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ABSTRACT

The focus of this book--an appeal for a reevaluation of the literature teacher's pedagogical goals and methods--is twofold: first, the reasons for the enjoyment of reading literature and suggestions for stimulating in students a love of plays, poetry, and novels; and second, new roles for the teacher. Chapter 1 outlines some of the problems facing the literature teacher; Chapter 2 reviews the meaning of literary "education"; Chapter 3 suggests ways of creating potent educational environments for literature teaching; Chapter 4 describes the problems, failures, and achievements of one experimental course; and Chapter 5 recommends some specific departmental reforms. A selected bibliography which represents the basic reading list of the course, Experimental Methods in the Teaching of Literature, is included. (This document previously announced as ED 041 026.) (JM)

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Literature

AND THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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CS 200 458

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For

Alice Gallo
Jack Rains
and
Betty Morris

Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception—which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and, to KNOW,
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.

ROBERT BROWNING

It is the tragedy of his life that he will probably never again find himself with a man like Gattegno, who knows, as few teachers do, that it is his business to put himself into contact with the intelligence of his students, wherever and whatever that may be, and who has enough intuition and imagination to do it.

JOHN HOLT

Literature and the English Department is an unusual publication for the Council. It was not commissioned as most Council books are; the manuscript came unsolicited. It is not broadly focused to insure against the appearance of a "party line." On the contrary, it is clearly single-minded. Normally, such a statement would find its place in a Council journal, balanced against other statements and subject to rebuttal. Yet independent readers and the members of the Committee on Publications all recommended that the Council publish the work.

Their reasons were twofold. In this age of committee prose and computer verse, all who recommended for publication felt it made humane sense to keep in motion an artful pen such as Mr. Mandel's. Moreover, Mr. Mandel's argument does not follow the traditional college "line" that stresses criticism and scholarship. The readers and members of the Committee on Publications, not all of whom agree with Mr. Mandel, reasoned that he may not convert all his readers; but those who disagree will, as they contend with the author, be compelled to rethink, to revalidate, and perhaps to modify their own positions.

Foreword by Robert F. Hogan, NCTE Executive Secretary

Preface

This book is one more literature teacher's personal appeal for an earnest reevaluation of our profession's pedagogical goals and methods. Change is in the air. I wish to add my testimony. My own classroom experiences and experiments suggest that we ourselves are largely responsible for the student apathy we complain of in the classroom, that we have become bogged down in a non-humanistic professionalism, static pedagogy, and a destructive cultural snobbism. My belief is that we can change all this, and make the study of literature into the stimulating, meaningful experience it should be.

It is difficult to speak with other teachers about these matters, which are so intimately connected with one's self-image as a person and teacher. My colleagues—though fewer and fewer—often become defensive and even hostile, feeling in my challenges a threat to their identities, to their many years' investment in a profession which demands time, devotion, and commitment. I myself, guilty of excessive missionary zeal when excited, become edgy, aggressive, inarticulate and opinionated. A healthy exchange of ideas too often degenerates into an unpleasant argument among red-faced, sputtering antagonists. I have turned to the written word as at least a calmer form of confrontation.

The following chapters have virtually written themselves. They are the results of my efforts to find honest, simple, subjective language to express frustration over the way we have often settled for "educating" a tiny fraction of a class while ignoring the majority. But, more important, I wish to communicate my joy—the result of recent, thrilling experiences in the classroom. No scholarly documentation appears in footnotes. The book must live with the advantages and disadvantages inherent in the subjective format I have chosen. For the reader interested in a more detached study of many of the issues discussed here, I recommend two works as a beginning: (1) *The Student in Higher Education* (January 1968), obtainable from The Hazen Foundation, New Haven, Connecticut, and (2) Joseph Katz and Associates, *No Time for Youth* (San Francisco, 1968). To some

degree, then, the following chapters comprise a portrait of the teacher as an old learner. I present it to other teachers as both a stimulant to controversy and an additional support for those who are currently suffering the academic despair I have so often felt.

This is not a book about undergraduate education in general. It is addressed specifically to college teachers in literature. For that matter, to a large degree it is directed only toward those teachers and departments which have allowed their teaching methods and goals to rigidify. I do not wish to seem ungracious to the many devoted teachers and innovative departments from whom we could all learn much of value. I admire much of what is alleged to be happening at such schools as Goddard, New College, Franconia, Hampshire, Friends World Institute, Livingston, Bensalem, Old Westbury, etc. And I respect the courage of many of my colleagues at large land grant universities who, in spite of occasional departmental harassment and conditions unconducive to serious pedagogical reformation, labor in the vineyards of change. Even here I have not written of ways to make the professional study of English as we know it more exciting to students. My attempt has been to focus on the reasons I like to read literature, and then to advance suggestions for stimulating in students a similar love of plays, poetry, and novels. A related focus is that of new roles (I should say non-roles) for the teacher himself.

My first chapter is a short, unfriendly essay outlining some problems of our profession, as I see them. In chapter 2 I turn to the meaning of "education" itself: again, a personal view, not startlingly original, but important as a substructure for the following two chapters. In chapter 3 I discuss positive ways of creating potent educational environments for the teaching of literature. Chapter 4 depicts rather minutely one experimental course I taught—its problems, failures, and achievements. The last chapter calls for some specific departmental reforms.

Many teachers of literature who share the opinions expressed in this book may be happy to know that we all find support in the research of Third Force Psychology, especially in the writings of Carl Rogers. I myself was surprised, but delighted, to discover the

similarities between my tentative pedagogic views and Rogers' stimulating theory of client-centered therapy (and student-centered education). It was not only after I had formulated my own views but even after I had begun to write these chapters that I found Rogers. As I read *On Becoming a Person* I was happily excited to realize that teaching procedures I had stumbled on intuitively were often similar to techniques described by Rogers. Needless to say, personal views which run counter to accepted professional opinion—even "liberal" opinion, that inflexible arbiter—cost the holder much in the way of confidence and courage. The recognition that my ideas on teaching are largely confirmed by Rogers' work has bolstered my own self-confidence. I gratefully acknowledge that my often rough notions have been subsequently refined in the fire of Rogers' lucid insights.

Even more immediate thanks are due to friends who have been willing to argue long and hard with me. Some, often bored to distraction by my obsessive interest in these ideas, have been the very authors of stimulating suggestions for teaching and department reform. No routine thanks, then, I lavish on my wife and colleague, Ruth Mandel, Marcia Landy and Robert Marshall of the University of Pittsburgh, Lee Kirby, David Johnson of the University of New Mexico, George Wolf of the University of Nebraska, Nancy Wolf of Nebraska Wesleyan University, and Roger and Debby Burbridge. Other friends have also been helpful, most especially my students in English 74, who gave me permission to quote from their journals. But the nine teachers are as responsible for the appearance of this book (though we are, of course, not all agreed on every point) as I am.

B.J.M.

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The English Department

Even though I am an English teacher, I enjoy reading literature. I am convinced that I read well and for the right reasons. It stands to reason, therefore, that I feel driven to add my voice to the small, but steadily growing, number of English teachers who have decided that their job is to encourage love of literature among undergraduates and who do not see in this effort an attack on rationality or evidence of the Decline of the West.

I think it best to begin this essay by saying why *I* like literature, in the hope of suggesting ways to encourage a similar sensitivity among our students. Like all people, I read literature for many reasons. These can be loosely summed up in three categories, which I present in order of their importance to me. First of all, I read for sheer enjoyment. Second, I read because I long to share the experiences of people who are portrayed as living life to the fullest: I find that contact with a Vronsky or an Oskar Mazerath makes my own life more vivid and meaningful. Finally, I read because of an interest in the historical period in which the book was written and the sensibility of the man who wrote it.

Though one's reading of imaginative literature may

lead to an involvement in cultural ideas, history, and the like, the actual experience of reading is a form of play. Dramas are in fact called "plays." Poetry—particularly lyric poetry—is also an attempt to create a spontaneous engagement in an imagined experience. Even the novel draws us inevitably into a participation in the adventures of its characters, if it is successful in vividly depicting those adventures. Only as we let ourselves be caught up in the play world created by the artist are we truly alive to the meaning of literature. I think there is more to it, however. For while we play, whether as children or adults, we relax, we open ourselves to experience. There is something obsessively childlike about most artists and lovers of literature. "Playing" like children, readers, alone and receptive and temporarily unguarded, put themselves into a situation which can touch them and change them. Literature is a game which lets villains be heroes (whether James Bond or Satan), outsiders be insiders. People whom we would detest and shun in daily life, we grow to love in novels for their very pains and mutilations. New perspective allows us to see ordinary folk as petty or noble, vicious or creative. With defenses down and a willingness to be deeply moved, we may find that the literary experience enriches and deepens our human sensibilities. As we learn to accept the world from hundreds of different perspectives, we begin to wonder where fiction leaves off and life begins. Any autobiographer knows that the book he has produced has inescapably caught much fiction between the covers.

The meaning of the literary experience has something to do with increased personal subtlety and awareness of ambiguity. At its best, it unsettles our convictions and prepares us for all possibilities. In other words, like the games of children, not only may poems, plays, and novels be enjoyable, but they may help to make us supple, agile, and responsive. Freud, Erikson, and Brown have all reminded us of Schiller's remark, "Man is perfectly human only when he plays." For me, reading literature must be, above all, a pleasurable experience if I am to fully open myself to its truths or find it springboarding me into other, related interests.

It should be clear that it is possible to rearrange an ordering

which puts pleasure first, and sometimes for valid reasons. But too often I have found myself reading for ends that will perhaps sound familiar: reading to "keep up" in my field or with current events, with the emphasis on the "keeping up" rather than on personal reward; reading to prevent embarrassment or to impress others; reading as a mechanical exercise, as an escape from thought or human relations. When, however, I read for enjoyment, enrichment, and insight, I feel more myself, less dishonest about my motives, and less artificial with other people.

One needs to avoid too much embarrassment in life and to impress others occasionally as well as to keep up, but when literature is used exclusively for these ends—I speak only for myself—the result is depression or tension, covered (who knows how poorly) by a facade of competent professionalism. Real reading done by real people—or me, when I am being rather more genuine than less—is a liberating, fresh experience. Experience is a crucial word. In spite of graduate-school training, I have come to believe that reading, even for a professor of literature, is only truly valuable or memorable when it is an experience as vivid and immediate as physical activity or stimulated emotion. In "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" Merleau-Ponty touches upon the same idea: "And as our body guides us among things only on condition that we stop analyzing it and make use of it, language is literary . . . only on condition that we stop asking justifications of it at each instant and follow it where it goes. . . ." That is what I mean by enjoyment.

In a short essay on fiction, Elizabeth Hardwick recently commented on the way memory of a great novel sticks with us even though we cannot remember crucial aspects of its form, presentation, or detail. "What indeed was Bulstrode's crime in *Middlemarch*? If sometimes one cannot quite remember the shape of Bulstrode's part in the plot, or even the final resolution of the Rosamund-Lydgate story, what can one mean when he says, with passion and conviction, that *Middlemarch* is a favorite novel?" I believe that one means that the reading of *Middlemarch* was an experience so absorbing as to have taken priority over other thoughts and perhaps activities during

the reading period and so affective as to have impressed itself on one's mind as a pleasurable and even formative event. What is remembered is not the craft of fiction, but the impact of the novel on the life of the reader. Miss Hardwick comes to virtually the same conclusion. The "greatness" of the book is felt by "a sort of remembrance of how one felt when one was first reading the book. . . . You know you were fascinated, you were convinced at the time, when you were deeply there. . . ."

Sheer pleasure may be enhanced by other reasons for reading. But if this first condition is satisfied, the others may follow naturally. For as I read, say, *Kristin Lavransdatter,* the uncritical, joyous experience little by little becomes enhanced by thoughtful evaluation of Kristin's or Erlend's behavior, by semi-conscious comparisons of the Norwegian medieval life style to my own, by open appreciation of Undset's insight into the mind and heart of this woman. Ultimately my experience of *Kristin Lavransdatter* will be sufficiently enhanced by critical thought; I may decide to read other works by Undset, or about Norwegian life, or about the Middle Ages. I may even decide to major in literature.

I chose to major in "English" because I enjoyed reading and desired this experience more often than others. Don't most English majors choose their field for the same reason? It seems to me that most literature students remember reading for fun and are initially dismayed and subsequently deadened by the emphasis they find in their English courses. If one majors in literature because he has read novels and poems with pleasure, it does not follow that he will or should be interested in literary trends, the history of literature, or figures of speech, though it also, needless to say, does not mean that these are without power to interest or enrich.

As an undergraduate I took a great many literature courses, but only a very few helped to nourish me or improve my taste. Although I could not have analyzed it then, the most inspiring classes were those in which the public dialog of the classroom merged somehow with the inner experience I had had with the work of art itself. When Mrs. Morris (to whom this book has been dedicated) could,

on the one hand, communicate her intense pleasure with the reading of Dante or Hamsun or Pasternak and, on the other, psychologically free her students to validate their own experience with the literature (whether joyous or not), the result was a fusing in joy of the reading and the discussion. Certainly I am ready to acknowledge that a work of literature may so intensely satisfy a reader that he becomes verbally crippled in class—just as a class may be so conducive to open discussion that even people who have not finished the literature at hand will speak openly and intelligently, as if they had completed the reading. Yet it is precisely because I have had a Mrs. Morris and a few other superb teachers that I know how overwhelmingly satisfying an experience it is to bring together the joy of Dante with the power of an open, pleasurable, freeing discussion.

Many teachers do not strive for this kind of fusion which makes the work of literature, the instructor, and the student one for a while; some teachers, who have never been there, do not know it is possible or important. But it is the experience of this intense but brief fusion that revealed to me the possibility of closing the artificial gap between public discussion and the poignant, personal experience of literature. And though I am astonished to find myself saying so, this little book is part of my own quest for the magnanimity of atmosphere so richly captured in my memory of Mrs. Morris. When I think about the important work of a teacher of literature, I remember Frost's lines (which of course have nothing to with teaching):

> Your destination and your destiny's
>
> Too lofty and original to rage.*

It is perfectly valid to read for reasons other than involvement and "equipment for living." We long to exercise our intellectual faculties and find meaning and order in detached, scientific analysis

* From "Directive" from THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST edited by Edward Connery Lathem. Copyright 1947, © 1949 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., of Jonathan Cape Limited, London, and of the Estate of Robert Frost.

of parts and wholes. But he who reads predominantly for these reasons—the "professional" student of literature—is too often an arid, dull person or an unimaginative one.

Students demand relevance. This term is difficult to pin down. But for the teaching of literature it must at least imply some recognizable connection between the dynamic imaginativeness of the art and the life styles and commitments of the professors. Poems and novels are not canned goods to be sold over the counter. They may in limited senses be artifacts susceptible to Aristotelian criticism, but they are not merely artifacts. They make demands of their handlers. Like our students, literature asks us to show in who we are and who we are becoming that we have been handling something that matters—that we have been, in fact, touched.

Students recognize and often talk about a gap between the literature a teacher deals with, whose values he espouses, and his "real life" of unimaginative compromise, his business-as-usual mentality even now as the world is burning. It is no wonder that the teaching of literature is often lackluster and ordinary. Too frequently it represents the semi-conscious, systematic deadening of human faculties. Certainly many teachers inspire students daily, and yet our timid pedagogical impulses are often rewarded by encouragement from the leaders of our profession. In the 1965 Report of the Commission on English (College Entrance Examination Board)—*Freedom and Discipline in English*—one reads: "In fact most of what a teacher can teach and a student can learn about literature is form—the rhetorical and structural means by which literature achieves its ends." I do not accept this view; indeed, for me the *least* we can provide our students is knowledge of form and structure. No, analysis of form is too easy. Literature provides us with what Merleau-Ponty describes as "symbols whose meaning we never stop developing." He goes on to say, "Precisely because it dwells and makes us dwell in a world we do not have the key to, the work of art teaches us to see and ultimately gives us something to think about as no analytical work can; because when we analyze an object, we find only what we have put into it." An inappropriate emphasis on secondary matters and scientism has

turned too many conveyers of our rich artistic heritage into sterile, timid readers. How often one hears the professor and even the graduate student condescend to and even condemn the living artist and modern literature! How often are English departments large enough to house artists without friction or conflict!

While many college teachers are men of fervor, something happens to them when they act together as a "faculty." Modern college English departments still act like ex-slaves. Many of them (at least in older schools) began life in the "service" of the institution as a whole, stressing composition for students majoring in other fields, rather than the reading of literature for its own sake. English teachers grew in time to despise this secondary position, kowtowing to the needs of specialists in "real" fields. The Modern Language Association publishes periodic reminders of how the study of English literature has had to pull itself up from its ignominious beginnings and of its present "free" status of an autonomous profession—equal to and separate from all other legitimate disciplines.

English departments, perhaps unsure of their inherent values and objectives, have tended to imitate the pedagogic and scholarly formulations of their older masters (philosophy, mathematics, science, history) and have correspondingly tended to look down upon even newer fields (sociology, psychology, not to mention the "practical" fields, such as engineering and business). Desiring to establish academic respectability, English departments have striven to create an image of no-nonsense professionalism. G. S. Rousseau of Harvard goes so far as to tell his undergraduate classes, "I am basically a pedant." The study of English literature had to be taken seriously by entrenched academicians of other fields. (Herbert Blau records in *The Impossible Theater* similar compromises forced upon people in the professional theater.) So the English department forgot "at school" what so many teachers knew at home—namely, that literature has to do with joy and creativity, pain and human growth. They turned its study into a formalized set of requirements, which only recently sensible departments have begun to loosen. Students were not expected to read for ecstatic insights into the fears, aspirations,

and behavior of human beings (authors', characters', and their own), but to learn about literature per se—what it "means," how it is constructed, into what tradition it fits, what critical approaches are respectable, and what is worth knowing. Where curricula were not fixed, leeway for dabbling was limited by arbitrary departmental directives: students must take X before Y, or two from column A, or four periods out of six.

Teachers perennially argue whether education should be designed for the benefit of the student's individual needs at the moment, or for something larger: the good of society, the preservation of a humanistic tradition, a future which will demand special tools and skills. Among literature teachers one often hears, "I teach books, not people." Even those teachers who love literature for its own sake and respect students often speak of the need to provide for them the best "cultural documents" available. On the other hand, a teacher may occasionally flirt with disaster by arguing to the effect that the particular work of literature is not really very important at all.

As evidence of the usual pedagogic ends and means I shall use the three university English departments in which I have taught. Clearly three schools represent no cross-section of the American higher education scene, but to the degree that they are representative, my reactions to their programs may be valuable to you. For information on schools which, lamentably, are still not typical, you may wish to read *New Dimensions in Higher Education*, a series edited by W. R. Hatch for the U.S. Office of Education. Number 15 in the series —Joseph Axelrod's "New Patterns in Undergraduate Education" (1967)—is especially valuable as a bibliographical source.

The three English departments I know well talk about intellectual freedom and creativity, but *operate* on the assumption that education is something teachers give and students get. Education is something valuable in its own right. The lecture system, with its lack of human interaction, is extensively used. All other courses (with rare exception) are pseudo-Socratic "discussions," with the teacher "inductively" leading the class to the notecards lying on the lectern or permanently imprinted on his mind. After all is said and done

about creative teaching, there are *things* to be learned. It is important to know what a trochee is, who the Cavalier poets were, what is meant by the term "American Adam."

A value judgment (seldom labeled as such at faculty meetings) is involved here. Some things are better than others to learn. My own Ph.D. advisor, whom I admire and respect, argued long and hard against my decision to choose the art of autobiography as a dissertation subject. It is not art, he argued; "it may be the road to the Temple, but it is not the Temple." In other words, in a "discipline" devoted to poems, plays, novels, and certain prose essays with the professional stamp of approval, there is something faintly disreputable in one's taking other kinds of writing seriously—even though the "other" genre may include St. Augustine, Rousseau, Gibbon, Yeats, Russell, and their like. Let us study "literature"; let us not ask what literature is or does. Sometimes we say that teachers provide "tools," which is another way of saying that education is some*thing* that will be of value later. As a friend of mine says repeatedly, "Not every class can be thrilling or exciting. Sometimes you've got to get down to business."

As a result of this kind of thinking, the English departments I know have chosen as their pedagogic goals the preservation of a received literary tradition. It is hard to get assembled faculty to admit in so many simple words that their goal is to send into the world men and women to whom have been transmitted the accepted literary values of the profession. But regardless of what is said, the way to decide what the central goals of the present system are is to examine the course offerings—at present virtually the only means of achieving whatever ends there may be. In my three schools the great bulk of courses fall into three categories: the "period" course (medieval, seventeenth century, Victorian); the genre study (Great Dramatic Masterpieces, The Rise of the Novel); the great-writer course (Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton). All these courses, whatever internal pedagogical methods they may use, are manifestly geared to preserving the beliefs that (1) certain men in certain times wrote certain kinds of literature, and that (2) tradition and professional standards are

adequate to decide which men, genres, and periods are the most sensible and rewarding to study. When a department makes it possible for a student to take courses in Renaissance plays or Chaucer, but not in early eighteenth-century autobiography or Shadwell (not to mention courses that cut across the three categories or ignore them or integrate them with other humanistic studies) it would seem reasonable to assume that the department has made an education to fit a mold or preserve a pattern.

Since the goal is the perpetuation of a received tradition, English departments have over the years come up with what appears a most economical curriculum. There is just so much time in a college career, and Chaucer is a better writer than Shadwell, the plays of the Renaissance are better than the autobiographies of the eighteenth century. So we provide our students with an array of tradition-oriented courses. Certain problems arise. We sensitively attempt to explain that the course "material" only *looks* static and tidy. We emphasize that there is a dynamic, even organic connection between neoclassicism and romanticism, but that they must be studied separately for reasons of order. Yes, of course there was romantic poetry written before Wordsworth; "pre-romantic" is a very misleading term. Well, yes, Dryden was a contemporary of Milton and Bunyan, but we read him as part of the Age of Reason. Your history professor is correct in suggesting that Pope and Swift do not represent the dominant intellectual currents of their age.

Because our departmental goal is to perpetuate a tradition, even teachers who savor the books they read for their own enjoyment feel a need to cover as much ground as possible. The body of traditional literature is immense, and one cannot master it without wide exposure to as much of it as possible. My present institution provides a "core" curriculum, requiring of the English majors special study of all the major historical periods, preferably in chronological order.*

*I am no longer with this institution but am happy to report that in the first term of 1969-1970 the department abolished not only the core curriculum, but every requirement for a major, except (1) the authorized *number* of credits for a major and (2) freshman composition —both university, rather than department, requirements.

Many teachers use anthologies in order to provide as much coverage as possible. If the teacher's job is to transmit something of the romantic tradition, the way to do it is to have the students read as many poems as possible before the course is forced to give way to the (competing?) Victorian tradition on deck for next term. Some of these anthologies include some long, whole works. Most do not. But in *any* pedagogical approach, it is plausibly argued, some things will be slighted or overlooked. Some professors provide mimeographed sheets of relevant data on writers not covered in the course: authors' dates, chief works, major contributions and influences all helpfully arranged and packaged, ready for memorization. Students often consider these study aids a great help.

You may find this description of our traditional pedagogical means and ends appealing. I myself do not wish to appear blackly hostile to the present system. As I outlined it, I must confess much of it seemed appealing to me. After all, I like you am a product of this kind of training and much that I value in my own education I credit to the sensitive transmitting of our literary heritage by brilliant (though isolated) teachers. As a result of the elaborate packaging of periods, genres, and writers, I have been introduced to certain lovely and powerful works that I might never have read had I not entered apprentice in our profession. For many people the conventional approach is a daily aesthetic and intellectual pleasure; for some, the occasional successes of the system justify its preservation. I do not wish to advance the absurd, contradictory proposition that what has had value for many is without value. To me, however, the present system —once capable of doing the job—seems wasteful, of both people and the tradition itself. In the next chapter I shall focus more directly on some positive directions we may take.

If there is one thing literature teaches us, it is that we are not alone. People whom we could never get to know or understand in real life because of our own terrors of the unknown are sympathetically drawn for us. The artist inhabits the inner world of his characters often without evaluation or judgment, and by so moving among his people, gets them to open up with him, to tell all, to

reveal themselves. The more one reads literature, the more likely it is that he will be able to see his own inner life, attitudes, and emotions as normal or at least duplicable in the lives of others and acceptable in many contexts. By portraying human experience, most of the world's mimetic art (didacticism, of course, serves a different function) reminds us of ourselves and helps us to be human or at least to recognize our brotherhood with other people.

I do not mean to paint an entirely somber picture. But isn't it ironical and sad that so often we English teachers put before our students fictions which are more alive and real than we are? As we retreat behind our masks of the "professional scholar," paradoxically turning ourselves into fictions, hiding ourselves from our students while unintentionally forcing them to adopt roles through our subtle evaluatory judgments and occasional open sarcasm, before us all parade the unforgettable words on the page, evoking for us (when it is not already too late) the illusion of a kind of human honesty that one finds but seldom in life. I shall never forget Anna Karenina, but for the life of me cannot remember one real person I may have met the same year, so long ago, that I turned the pages of Tolstoy's great novel.

We must not forget or fear the simple fact that literature is literature only when it is an experience operating fully on our minds and hearts. The student who reads *Volpone* primarily as an example of Elizabethan drama cannot have had as rich an experience as he who has read (or better yet, seen) the play and recognized all-too-familiar patterns of his own behavior. Too many teachers shy away from these personal matters, but isn't that what Jonson had in mind? Because the ends of the literary experience have been obscured by modern professionalism, our teaching has become to a frightening degree irrelevant, mechanized, and inhuman.

We have believed that to be respected in the twentieth-century academy, we must specialize. We have become experts in the Romantics or the eighteenth century or the Victorian period. While a DeMott or a Kampf speaks with students of the human values and experience of literature, the great majority speak of hypotheses, em-

phasize the value of "tools" and coverage, produce well-constructed articles on arcane subjects, making certain to drain off all imagery and emotion and to include an "abstract" of the article. It makes no difference that all of this utterly bypasses the meaning of literature itself, as well as the human experience of one's confrontation with Mr. Flood, Uncle Vanya, or Clytemnestra. Where in the professional study of literature do we hear echoes of Kafka's remark to Oskar Pollak?—"The books we need are the kind that act upon us like a misfortune, that make us suffer like the death of someone we love more than ourselves, that make us feel as though we were on the verge of suicide, or lost in a forest remote from all human habitation —a book should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us." To speak at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of the poignantly personal significance of one's encounter with a novel or poem would be to hold up the agenda of business, the "business" of literature.

Although there is significant change in the air, it will encourage the process for us to look at some examples of how I and my colleagues have taught literature in ways which dehumanize us all or treat the students as menials or boors, or worse, the Enemy. It seems to me that when we lecture to our students on the ten major differences between romanticism and classicism or on five characteristics of the epic poem or on the difference between synecdoche and metonymy, no matter how dearly the students "need" this information, we are treating potentially lively and sensitive men and women as if they were passive boxes, created to hold items of great value to us. I know that most of us do not spend our days dealing exclusively in such hardware. But the constant student complaint continues to be that faculty members expect students to be walking containers of *our* information about literature. Sometimes we even ask them, usually when we more than suspect that they have been bored to a fine glaze, to *think* about what they have heard (learned, we call it) today, so as to be ready to answer questions on Wednesday. As if anyone ever had to be encouraged to think about what was genuinely of personal interest or value! As if the teacher himself spent the next few hours spontaneously thinking about the "rise of neoclassicism"!

To fill up a student's head with information, however potentially valuable the information may be in certain contexts, is to treat the student as an object. Real learning seldom occurs at such times. I remember the student who told me that in the sentence "The girl has eyes like her mother's" the word "like" is a simile. Don't you just know the canned definition of "simile" which gave rise to her error and which helped to make her a non-reader of poetry? I for one must confess to having "taught" the infamous definition for years. Wouldn't it have been better to stimulate the girl's natural curiosity about strange, new worlds than to take the much easier course of filling her head with rootless definitions as if they were valuable in their own right?

I am not criticizing the content of individual courses, nor am I forgetting that many teachers are running experimental courses. But I am urging that our main job should be to make literature the joy for others that it has been for us. Nothing depresses me more than to hear a bright adult say that he took his required English courses in college as fast as he could and never read another novel or poem. This kind of remark—I heard it two times yesterday alone—grows from the notion, perpetuated by the nature of modern universities, that literature is a "field," a separate "discipline," an area of "study" requiring, like all other respectable pursuits, professional expertise. In self-defense I can talk myself into believing this myth from time to time. But recently I heard an extremely intelligent and imaginative professor of education say that he would not dream of reading Greek poetry because he does not feel *qualified*. He went on to say that he feels he needs an English teacher to help him read hard works. So now it has come to pass in an era devoted to mass liberation from illiteracy and ignorance, that one must be, in the words of an old friend of mine, Certified to Read a Poem. Of course I understand that there are degrees of understanding literature, that there is insightful reading and foolish, but any teaching process which ultimately *prevents* reading is no teaching at all and indicates the existence of a modern intellectual tragedy.

Academicians frequently treat students as incompetent inferiors.

Students have become the objects of a subtle but far-reaching prejudice. We forget Herbert Spencer's words: "One who, not being a slave of tradition, contemplates schools as they have been . . . instead of being struck by the stupidity of the pupils, may more reasonably be struck by the stupidity of the masters." For all the pedagogical innovation today, one still observes that every semester begins with many teachers commenting on how "good" their classes are this term, how improved the "quality" is. It would seem that we have been looking for students who have received our education, somehow, before getting to us. The kids do the work assigned to them, are responsive to demands. As the semester wears on toward the middle and the students' resolution to do well *this* term is worn thin by boredom in class and very real demands made on their private lives, the teachers' tone changes to anger and despair, or to cynicism. The undergraduates' assertion of human rights or the slightest hint that they wish to see the reading of literature as *part* (or perhaps even no part) of busy, exhausting lives is interpreted as laziness and even moral lassitude. Student criticism of the "material" on our syllabuses we label boorishness or unformed opinions. And when we fail to generate interest in "Lycidas," we sigh over the lack of motivation in our students. How often I have been shocked to discover that one of my dull students, "devoid of personality," is in other contexts lively, enthusiastic, clever, or talented. The more students sense that they are being viewed and treated as lazy inferiors, the more they are likely to "perform" poorly—that is, as expected.

From the freshman theme to the Ph.D. dissertation and beyond, subtle and overt pressures have turned literature students into unimaginative writers of useless and often tedious essays. For years I asked my students to be "imaginative" in their exams. As I graded the papers, I would discover that, though I would read to the end of the blue book, I knew by the end of the first or second paragraph whether the student was an A, C, or F. The reading of such exams I found excruciatingly boring and depressing, even when I could give a paper an A. Often I would be shocked to discover that I had given a high grade to a girl who "in life" struck me as lackluster, conniving,

or both. Sometimes I had—even more disturbing—given a low grade to a student who in class had been alert and responsive.

It disturbs me to think how long I lived with these paradoxes. Only recently have I begun to understand them: that if I knew at once whether a paper was good or bad, it was because the student either was or was not writing to a formula I had unwittingly accepted, that the formula could be mastered by a diligent or dishonest dullard and rejected by more independent spirits who *believed* as sincere my call for imagination, and that often-repeated formulas are hypnotic and soporific. Slowly I came to feel that a really imaginative essay will never be tedious, that it will shake my assumptions, and will be, by formulaic criteria and standards, ungradable. It will stimulate thought and emotion. But it will probably never spring from the kinds of exam questions I and my colleagues traditionally have assigned.

In order to protect himself, a professor may block out two-thirds of his class, writing them off as incorrigible, believing that he has reliably separated the good students from the uneducable. The dutiful few students who are accepted by the teacher say and write the appropriate responses to questions about literature. All teachers want their students to think, but many teachers do not realize the degree to which they want the students to reproduce their own ideas, thinly disguised. The student is "thinking" when he says what the teacher has thought. "If I only reached a few," too many professors say at the end of the semester, "I feel as if something has been accomplished." Here's what has been accomplished: an aristocratic notion of education has been used to evade or rationalize the problems of mass education in a democratic society; a few students, either too literate and imaginative to need a teacher at all or too intellectually servile to resist conformity, have gotten As; a huge number of potential readers, the very ones who need the education, have been pigeonholed as unreachable; a professor has called on a soothing rhetoric which manages to allay some serious, if unconscious, self-doubts about his usefulness as a teacher.

Individual teachers often design courses which are lively and,

in the last analysis, relevant, but as "professionals" within departments we tend to distrust the motives of our students. We design an educational program more to catch the guilty than to liberate the imaginative and involved; we devise methods for keeping them in their place: a rich assortment of evaluations administered every few weeks which permit the student to demonstrate that he has been socialized enough to allow him further reading under the guidance of a benevolent expert or system. I say "benevolent" because English teachers do invite students to their homes, have beers with students, and the like. But on Monday morning everyone is back in place, the system grinds on, the papers are due, and the buddy gives his friend a C. Some departments have fixed syllabuses so that, say, all sophomores may be reading *Heart of Darkness* at the same time; these schools may even standardize their exams across the sections. For reasons never made clear to me, it is supposed to be an intellectual advantage to have everyone monolithically programed to be turning the same pages at the same time.

Quizzes, exams, short papers, long papers—they have all done their share to stifle curiosity and initiative. I am aware, of course, that an occasional paper topic may stimulate intellectual growth and imagination, but am skeptical as to the overall worth of such assignments. All such methods of evaluation, as well as the daily judgments implied by our responses to student work and our attitudes in class, constantly trample on what I would like to believe we all really know, and that is that the reading of literature is a peculiarly private matter. Just think how jealously we each guard our own readings of favorite works. Even when we turn to the *PMLA*, we do it often enough to discover another man's errors in judgment about a work which we have come to feel is ours.

If a student has not enjoyed reading "Night Thoughts," a paper topic on the poem, while it may arouse interest in the work, will probably encourage the fraudulent kind of writing we all know so well. The mask of the "English major" goes on, as the student dutifully writes an analysis of the "parts in relation to the whole," or "fits" the poem into its "period," or—as a psychologist friend of

mine typifies all literary investigation—he studies the broccoli imagery in the first twenty lines. God help the student who really cares about what he writes. I don't mean he who *thinks* he cares as the writing itself becomes its own kind of self-perpetuating experience, but the one who cares where it matters. How can a student who really gets turned on to a paper topic about a poem which has compelling meaning for him possibly write a personally satisfying essay when, at the same time, he must worry about a term paper in psychology, an overdue physics assignment, ten math problems, and two chapters in his geology book? Not to mention the rest of the work in English, which he must master in order to pass the exam. Why do we admire the student who manages, or appears to manage, such an exhausting feat? Just last year I and my colleagues unintentionally drove from the university a fine, sensitive student who cared about what she wrote, but could not be five people at once. She could only write as herself one thing at a time. For such a person there is little room in the modern university.

But I digress. The point I wish to make is that since the reading of literature is a private experience, a forced public response may all too often be nothing more than a socialized ritual, cut off, even entirely, from the vital meaning (or meaninglessness) of the reading experience. I dislike myself for every A paper and every article I ever wrote about a work of art which essentially meant nothing to me. They become the easiest papers to write.

The cynicism of students can be awe-inspiring. The grinding out of papers calls for a process which begins with "psyching out" the teacher and ends with the use of a gimmick or formula. I am speaking here of our good students, even our best. When my wife entered graduate school, a fellow student—now a novelist of ability and distinction—admonished her not to get too worked up about papers, but to find some "bit," some tricky device or theme which could be used as the organizing principle of paper after paper, for course after course. Any person who has been a successful student of literature knows how useful such advice is in "beating the system." It is not education the student is trying to avoid. What he is trying to avoid

is a stultifying machine-like process which takes into account virtually none of his particular needs and aspirations.

English teachers, like everyone else, want order. This is natural. But as seekers after truth we should be looking for many things, including the way literature operates on a receptive sensibility—still a deep, rich, and largely mysterious matter, since it involves not only the cognitive processes, but also the wellsprings of nonverbal emotion. One of my colleagues recently argued quite cogently that since we know virtually nothing about literary criticism or ways of teaching literature, we should not experiment blindly on our students, but follow our traditional patterns, at least for some years. But to me it is worth a great deal to learn the truth about how an individual poem or play affects me or someone else. I am also fascinated by the meaning of feeling and form in art and feel that startling things can be said and learned when readers are not hampered by tired papers on "broccoli imagery." I do not advocate experimenting on students, but with them.

It is not sufficient to let students choose their "own" topics for paper assignments. Some professors feel that they are in the vanguard of radical change when they do this. I have seen in my own experience that when I used this approach, one of two things generally happened: on the one hand, some students "chose" to write on broccoli imagery or the like (which shows a failure of either imagination or nerve), while other kids, their spontaneity crushed by years of hopelessly stifling schoolwork, came to me begging for a topic. (Has the college student who irritates you by constantly coming up to your desk to find out "what you want" really misread your signals?) No, we are all trapped by the past—students as well as teachers—and to change one pedagogical method without altering the structure of the system will rarely lead to new self-understanding and development. Adding two courses on black literature will not suffice. As a member of the New York Sixth Street Theater recently told my drama class, we do not need avant-garde changes, but counter-garde options.

The saddest thing I heard this week was of the intelligent female student who argued that she does not want personal contact

with her teachers and does not want to participate in open-discussion classes. What she wants is factual material delivered impersonally in a lecture because her desire, her goal in life, is to become a scholar. What distortion of values has allowed this girl to "idealize" scholarship in such an arid, aloof, and anti-humanistic way? Why have we not taught her what Carl Rogers has said so well about the humanity of science, not to mention humane letters? "Science exists only in people. . . . Knowledge—even scientific knowledge—is that which is subjectively acceptable. Scientific knowledge can be communicated only to those who are subjectively ready to receive its communication."

In the classroom and in the teacher's office, we let slip through our fingers chance after chance to educate our students. There are exceptions, brilliant literature teachers daily creating a climate in which young men and women can grow in freedom. But there are many teachers trapped by their training in graduate school (which even now as more and more professors experiment with their teaching methods has virtually nothing to do with preparing graduate students to teach literature), teachers who fail to liberate the minds and hearts of most of their students. I know because I have been such a one. But I am slowly, sometimes painfully, struggling away from the self-protective aristocratic notion that it will suffice to stamp my signature into a handful of acquiescent clay. I wish to turn teaching into the thrilling experience I dreamt of before I allowed myself to be stifled by the frustrations of autocratic methods, professional standards, student apathy, and fear-ridden disapproval of colleagues. When I keep myself open to the meaning of past experiences, I know how badly I have failed as a teacher. I think back to my worst classes: bored students, even sullen, sitting in the back of the room. Even I was bored by my own words, hearing them float heavily in the room, soothing all but the most eager (how can they write *that* down in their notebooks!) into a dull stupor.

My "good" classes teach me a more painful lesson: Mandel, you have been in love with your own voice. The "good" classes: I was animated and "there." But how much of this animation was an

act, even semi-thought out in advance? (One of my colleagues once wrote "wow" into the margin of a scholarly paper he was to read. The word was to be uttered "spontaneously.") As I reconsider those good classes it would seem that my goal was to excite the students into accepting my enthusiasm and even my insight or knowledge as theirs. A few did. They got As because they "cared about the material." I wonder now who else was in those classes. I owe them an apology. Why did I consider those classes good? Two reasons: (1) my self-satisfied feeling that I was worth listening to; and (2) the recognition that some of the students loved me. They left the class saying, "Wasn't he great today?"

Now as I think back on such performances (I am still prey to their lure), I wonder, is education inseparable from theater? Must the teacher be an actor? Some of my teaching friends say yes. But I have come to doubt that I have been hired to perform. It is crucial to transmit enthusiasm and a life style to students, but is excitement on their part equivalent necessarily to learning and personal development? I do not think so any more. One can be excited without really involving oneself in the process of personal development, like fans at a sports event. Is "Wasn't he great today?" the same as "What do you make of the scene in *Macbeth* we were discussing today?" No. Does a history of handing over to the student neatly tied packages (through either a lecture or the pseudo-Socratic inductive method) constitute a rewarding experience? To a degree, yes. But I cannot but reluctantly come to the conclusion, especially when I consider the sullen back rows, that my methods of teaching literature have been more frustrating than satisfying.

The well-organized hour which wastes no time and is organically complete runs the risk of turning students out each day who have no reason to worry or think about the ideas discussed in class. The illusion is fostered that an idea or education can be controlled, parcelled out, kept in bounds. More and more I see the classroom and the group meeting as a place and occasion for the participants to validate each other's existence—that is, an occasion to say, "Hi! I am keeping up my side of the contract by reading A, B, and C and

by worrying about the following thoughts. What have you been up to?" In other words, I have lost much of my faith in the classroom as a place in which education can occur regularly and successfully. I think now of it as a place to report progress.

I am writing this essay because, little by little, some illusions of the appropriateness of my past methods and those of my professional colleagues are dropping away. Writing about it in a personal way will speed up the process for me and perhaps keep it pure. As Jules Henry says, an author "becomes a creature of his book . . . he can never be the same again." It may be of help to you too, if you have suffered as I have. Despite the best intentions, we have created an atmosphere of staggering triviality and dishonesty. Cheating on papers, the use of study guides (some of us even write them), phony responses to phony inductive questions—these have all become national sports, and we have created this appalling situation. By our failure to trust in the humanity of our authors and our students, we have turned the former into "required texts" and the latter into cowards or rebels. Instead of fulfilling our honest and reasonable desire to turn students into sensitive readers, our system—for vast numbers of English majors and us, their teachers—has been a downright failure, a pathetic botch, substituting in our methodology and syllabuses grotesqueries for life, amber for air.

We have taken refuge in aristocratic disdain for the needs of society. Many professors today assume that they have developed radical consciousness because they choose to center their attention on the freaks and speed-fiends. To me this is nothing but the old snobbishness merely directed at a different group, or the old group with new hair. The point is that it is not too late for us to do our share to teach, to humanize a society which presently still remains unhelped by the reading of meaningful novels, poems, and plays. We need no longer produce people who may remember having had "good English teachers" in college, but who have forgotten how (did they ever learn?) to read.

The Process of Literary Education

The pedagogical goals advanced by this book, like the traditional goals of English departments, are based on assumptions about education. These assumptions I developed experientially in the classroom, but they have found encouraging support in the ideas of most psychologists and sociologists. I have no desire to urge monolithic support of these assumptions. I operate better from them than from others, perhaps equally defensible. For me, an education is not a thing, but a process—not a desirable end, but motion and constant rearrangement of values and perceptions. As revealed by Henry Adams, education is nothing one gets, but what one *does* as he comes to understand how to think and cope with a world which bombards him with intellectual and sensual choices from every side. As I write this I am aware how unoriginal a view it is and yet how unacceptable to educators over the years, if actual practices are to be the test. Everyone talks about the meaning of liberal education, but few live day by day with the implications of the idea. It is one thing to say and another to live by the conviction that education is not a tool with which one digs into the mysteries of life, but an act, the digging itself. Education happens to people. It cannot be measured in terms of achievement or

acquisition of knowledge, although these things can, of course, be measured in their own right; it can only be measured in terms of psychological activity, growth, and movement. It is not so much a matter of what the student knows at the end of the term as who he is becoming.

The assumptions I have been discussing lead to my goal as a teacher of literature. I put it before you as an ideal which, when reached or even approached, stirs emotions, efforts, and attitudes (I almost wrote "altitudes") in the teacher and student that neither knows he is capable of.

My goal as a teacher of literature is to stimulate the free use of literature in ways which may be of personal, living use to the students. I believe that it is for this reason literature is written, and I know that is why I read it. I try not to let professional concerns with literature influence my teaching.

If you are skeptical, you need not trust me or even your own deepest promptings in this direction. Thomas Mann himself urged the same view. In "The Making of *The Magic Mountain*," he asks his reader to read the novel twice, but goes on immediately to say, "A request not to be heeded, of course, if one has been bored at the first reading. A working of art must not be a task or an effort; it must not be undertaken against one's will. It is meant to give pleasure, to entertain and enliven. If it does not have this effect on a reader, he must put it down and turn to something else."

Here I am afraid that I may part company with some readers who have been travelling with me until now. Many teachers will argue that literature is, of course, meant to give pleasure and that in one's richest encounters with it there will be a deepening of perception, sensitivity, and joy. But they will argue that as one deals more and more with literature some professional standards must be adhered to, that discipline in studying literature requires acquaintance with literary and historical backgrounds, genres, literary criticism, and the like. What I am saying is that "professionalism" in our field need not mean that at all.

As Benjamin DeMott argues in *Supergrow*, studying "genres,"

"literary history," and the like is comparable to a chemist's studying test tubes, rather than what goes on inside the test tubes. I know why I read plays and novels and I also know that reading, say, *The Heart of Midlothian* may arouse my interest in nineteenth-century literature, or the novel form, or Scottish patterns of culture, but as I pursue these interests I am satisfying a felt intellectual need. I distrust humanists who say that the study of literature necessitates a degree of scientism and "professionalism," as though somehow one felt that Scott or Aeschylus or Thomas had written their great works for the special benefit of professional English teachers, who would, in turn, act as translators for the masses. I assume that most authors have written for readers, not for college teachers and students involved in a massive educational-economic enterprise.

Each literary work has the power to create its own audience. The "professional" should be, it seems to me, a man who has read much, felt deeply, and thought sensitively. Basically his job should be to provide his students with literature that they may like, to serve as a model of humanistic values, to make available an atmosphere conducive to the richest exchange of feelings and ideas, to stimulate by the example of his own genuine enthusiasm, and to offer expertise when it is called for by the students. If the teacher and a group of students have developed a natural "scientific" curiosity about literature (for example, an interest in the relationship of phenomenological psychology to literature or an interest in the metrics of sprung rhythm), it would be in their best interest to spend time exploring the dimensions of their subject. That is quite different from assuming that a reader becomes a professional only as he acknowledges that it is time to get down to the business of studying history and genres—in short, everything but what literature has to tell us. Fortunately, relatively few teachers do, in practice, ignore or slight the imaginative center of the works they teach, but yet faculty meetings always provide a forum for some of the teachers to demand a return to standards, discipline, and professionalism—what Freud called "the flight into reality."

It is hypocrisy to teach a false, academic kind of reading if it

does not mirror one's own, private, best experiences with literature. George B. Leonard has written of the Victorian effort to imprison art "in heavy, stolid buildings . . . called 'art museums' . . . or 'symphony halls' and 'opera houses.'" These stolid buildings are, of course, still with us—our measure of what is great, no matter how dull. English teachers today in placing their highest value on tradition are, in effect, maintaining a verbal museum. "And here is our early nineteenth-century collection. . . ." I have no desire to be a curator. Literature is worth reading when it stimulates intense or lively or deep or inspired thought or feeling (better yet, thought *and* feeling) in the reader. When such activity is happening, education is going forward. Without such pleasurable involvement, reading is like a field trip of ghetto kids to the Metropolitan Museum.

I hope that this presentation of my goals will not be read as anti-intellectual. I have not attacked any specific kinds of literature or works from any particular period or by any authors in particular. Nor have I made a plea for the use of "easy" books, rather than "hard" ones. What I have done is shifted the center of attention away from the Great Tradition to the people who either will or will not find meaningfulness in it: our future, the students. Instead of stressing literature's undeniable connections with history and philosophy, I have swung the light onto the inseparability of literature from human psychology.

The assumption that education is a fixed state valuable in its own right has as its corollary the notion that education per se is more important than the people getting it. New students come and go; the communal chemistry of the class may change from day to day; personal needs, aspirations, fears, and hopes may vary by the minute, but the syllabus remains intact, the material must be covered. My assumptions lead in a different direction. Instead of assuming that a class should rise to the occasion and satisfy our demands, I feel we should be saying, "They're here, what can we do for them?" Only the teacher should be graded. Such a remark, however, stems from a view of the educational process which is still not prevalent, though it has always been known by some. Herbert Spencer, im-

pressed with his father's teaching methods, wrote that the elder Spencer had "reached some general ideas" concerning education, "and saw the need for adjusting the course of instruction to the successive stages through which the mind passes." One of my colleagues recently asserted that we are not here to "cater to students." But as teachers is that not exactly what we should be doing—catering to the real needs of the real students who meet daily with us?

It is time to give up our aristocratic notions about education. In a few years staggering numbers of American youth will be sitting in our classrooms. Already more than 50 percent of college-age men and women are pursuing some sort of higher education. It is clear that eventually every young man and woman who can physically struggle to the door of a university will expect an education. Our job will be to find ways of making the reading of literature as potently meaningful as it can be for large numbers of people of varying intellectual ability and from vastly different backgrounds.

We cannot expect the presently inadequate methods to be more successful in the future. The students who will come to us are going to have certain almost desperate needs. More important than their self-conscious ignorance about books will be their largely unconscious ignorance about the process of education itself. Coming from homes in which the parents as wage earners suffer what Jules Henry calls "the fear of becoming obsolete," the students will have had before them for years patterns of timid conformism and cultural conservatism. A political and economic system which makes huge competitive demands on them will find them (again in Henry's words) "quietly undermining it by doing the least they can rather than the most."

Surely we must all recognize that emotionally deadened, culturally deprived students will not respond in significant ways to a pedagogical system based on the purely rational presentation of the best literature. Even now only three kinds of students tend to learn in our classrooms: the extremely bright and sensitive students; the students who have been brought up in homes which respect human identity enough to furnish it with music, art, and letters; the highly competitive, driven students whose needs for authoritative recognition

urges them through our programs with a desperateness which should make us cry. As any English teacher knows, there are more of the last group than either of the others—and precious few of any. How can we drain off the destructive competition and, at the same time, create a "clarifying educational environment" (O. K. Moore) which will allow more students more of the time to share in the thrilling process of personal emotional and intellectual growth?

We should begin by knowing something about the group we teach. Who are these students? Where do they come from? What part of the world? the country? the city? What does it mean if your class is comprised of lower middle class students? What have been their group taboos and valued goals? Does it make any difference in your selection of novels if the class is predominantly Jewish or Irish Catholic or Negro? What sorts of educations have their parents had? Are these first or second generation college students? Are they English majors or are they fulfilling "distribution" requirements?

These questions, basically sociological, are ignored by many English teachers, teaching books, not people. At my present institution three or four programs funnel into our courses disadvantaged black youth, but no seminars, mimeographed information, or departmental guides are made available to the faculty in order to help the teacher come to grips with the particular problems raised by the presence of students whose abilities and backgrounds can differ so radically from the white majority's in the class. A related example comes to mind. A friend of mine, an otherwise sensitive person, attempts to teach the *Iliad* to her ill-prepared, hostile classes at a desperate Negro college in the South. They are either going "to get a college education, or they're not." Any doubt? It apparently does not matter if they emerge, after four years of (for them) irrelevant reading, anti-intellectual and bored with education.

I have been mocked and accused of dilettantism when I have suggested that English teachers should put down their customary research and pick up the latest sociological findings about group mobility, the relationship of the humanities to technology, T-group methods, psychological resistance, and the like. *We* are not sociolo-

gists; we are humanists. So we stick to the syllabus, and students who come from households where no reading is done and from third-rate, backwater high schools are assigned *An Essay on Man*. We close our eyes to the fact that many students cannot even understand the raw meaning of two lines in a row ("I understand all the words, but *still* can't see what he is trying to say"), let alone find personal enrichment in the work's thesis.

The opaqueness of much of the literature frustrates, even maddens, many students. Their desire to understand is often strong, but the need to "do well" is even greater. I sometimes wonder how aware my traditionalist colleagues are of the amount of plagiarism and cheating there is in virtually all courses. I learned, for instance, that in a traditional genre-introduction course taught several years ago every student except *one* plagiarized to some degree on a paper on one of Donne's songs. (The teacher wound up giving the honest student a C. How could an honest paper by a nineteen-year-old boy compete with papers based on sophisticated critical evaluations and explications of the poem?)

Once a course is over or in a free environment, students will often confess to the outrageous quantity of cheating they have done. Bolstered by their fellow students, such confessors actually crow. And yet I am convinced that students do not want to cheat, they want to learn.

The more we focus our attention on the specific problems of real human beings, the more we are likely to harness their honest energies. Their yearning for experience and their raw vitality ideally should open up the way for education.

The question of students' ages is very important. We know that human biology is reflected in the rhythms of life, that between the potent ages of eighteen and twenty-five human energy is flagless, motivations intense, curiosity unbounded, communal learning keen, sexual interest and activity often at its zenith. Teachers often forget about the naked power sitting in their stifled classrooms. One need only think back to oneself as an undergraduate to remember a person who was acutely alive to pain and joy, experimentation and experi-

ence. More than ever before, students in the United States are alive and responsive to their environments. Some of our students are living communally, some are smoking pot, making love, discovering their identities, and often rejecting our methodology and order with a cynicism which borders on the eccentric. Why treat this youthful energy as anything other than what it is? There are books they want to read. Keep your ears open; they are talking intensely about *Steppenwolf*, *Siddhartha*, and *Journey to the East*, about *Soul on Ice* and Malcolm X's *Autobiography*. They are reading first-rate books on the city, racial conflict, and radical politics. They are speaking intelligently about *Blow-up*, the Fellini films, and Bergmann's. Less imaginative students carry *The Detective*, *Hotel*, and even much better books, perhaps by accident.

There are poems, plays, and novels from all over the world to which we can introduce them. Why saddle a lively twenty-year-old with works you know cannot compete on the experiential level with his other activities? For example, at twenty most people are not open to the power of allegory; such generalizing only has meaning for one who is not submerged in particularly overwhelming personal experiences. Another unlikely candidate for their attention is eighteenth-century literature. Why require reading in classical literature, with its stress on order, decorum, control, and rules, when these are the very states young men and women consciously and unconsciously deplore? If we must give them didacticism, let us find causes and morals with which this generation can identify.

It may be argued that these students need to be taught respect for order and decorum. But one need only point out that (1) it has never been the job of literature to teach a *particular* value system or world view; we have always taught classicism as but one style among many, and (2) our decision to provide literature which will appeal to student taste will in no way prevent civil, moral, and religious authorities from pursuing their own goals so far as the minds of students are concerned. Society quite consistently preaches and prefers an Apollonian approach to life to the "spilt religion" of romanticism. Our students have learned of this form of sublimation

all their lives and will, for the most part, revert to type as they get older. At age twenty a man may hope to allow the Dionysian principle to dominate. As literature teachers we know the vast artistic resources available representing this principle. And as lay students of anthropology and psychology, we can trust our charges to act like forty-five-year-olds soon enough.

My point, simply, is this: it is a mistake to treat a twenty-year-old as if he were forty. Such treatment does him no good. Either he will reject our offices, or, worse, he will become forty prematurely. If biologically, psychologically, and sociologically he is not prepared for, say, "Religio Laici" or "The Vanity of Human Wishes" he may look at the words on the page, even closely enough to answer our questions, but he will not have read the poems. I *now* enjoy these two poems; they are among my favorites, but I remember a time when it was impossible to read them. So I sympathize with the suffering undergraduate who must pretend to find meaning in them. It is not reading literature if the poems have not latched into the reader's soul; it will not have been fun. Memory of the words will soon blend into the vast blur of pointless verbiage which we label education.

I do not think it is better to be twenty than forty. Not where books are concerned. Each age has its appropriate experiences. Joyfully watching one's children grow is like nothing that happens in a collegiate bull session. Reading Mill's *Autobiography* as an adult can be as deeply meaningful as reading *Soul on Ice* at twenty. We do not like to see a middle-aged nineteen-year-old, whether he is, in fact, forty-five or nineteen. To each his own. One can be learning and growing, being himself, at both ages. If we dedicate ourselves at age forty to the teaching of twenty-year-olds, helping them find what they are looking for at that point in their lives, they will grow in response to our genuine efforts, and we will become richer as our pedagogic needs, so natural at forty, are satisfied.

There is a world of books awaiting our students and us. Let us forego our prejudices against non-English literature. Who cares if something is lost in translation, if what is left is powerful, hypnotic and formative? To provide only English works is parochial and

sterile. Along with Shakespeare and Dickens, let's share with our students (and not only in one semester of "world literature") Dostoyevsky, Murasaki, Grass, Hamsun, Proust, Gide—in short, all the world's writers who can ravage the mind of an undergraduate. If we have kindled in them a love of the literary experience, I think we can trust them to follow their inclinations at forty and read books which can satisfy the very different needs of a man old enough to have college-age children. You probably will never reread *Of Time and the River* and *Look Homeward, Angel,* but are you not a fuller, richer person for having read them when you were young?

Now I must turn to a more ambiguous subject: the conference between teacher and student. Most teachers truly want their students to learn, and yet, under conditions in which the most meaningful learning can occur, we often muff it. One reason why we lose significant opportunities is that we forget—how easy it is to forget—that the student visiting us has a rich life of his own in which our English course may play an incredibly small part.

The student who sits across from us may want to learn, but one thing he probably has learned before he ever sees us in conference is how to protect himself from experiencing too much self-doubt and insecurity—the psychological states most often fostered by the educational establishment. We want him to read *In Memoriam* and are willing to help him. We share our time, perceptions, and feelings. And the student shares his. At least that is the illusion. But what about reality? I would like to tell you about two informal discussions I have recently had with students. Since I know both of them rather well, they were capable of speaking with considerable honesty.

The young lady, a prospective English major, blushingly confessed that she cannot read anything at all. It is as simple (and complex) as that. Oh, she can tell you the words and their individual meanings, but her terrified feeling is that she does not understand the overall meaning of what she reads. There is no recognition of meaning, form, essence, or vital life. Words do not rise to sense; they make only a vessel into which meaning must be poured by a teacher.

So frightening is this appalling sense of reality to her, that she has stopped all reading, even of magazines and comic strips! Yet this girl is a college student, passing all her courses—a good girl, no star in any subject, but intellectually indistinguishable (to the naked eye) from scores of students who graduate with B.A.s every year. How can she pass her courses? How does she manage to stay alive in the academic community? The questions are rhetorical. But can you imagine this student going from conference to conference admitting that she cannot and does not read? She may not know how to read, but she does know that the professor does not consider himself a teacher at Cupcake College, that there are standards to uphold. She knows when to keep quiet. Naturally her terror of flunking forces her into routine deception of her teachers and contempt for serious thought. She desperately needs an education. But by and large the real needs of this student are invisible to most faculty members and even to her peers. Of what use is a conference about *In Memoriam*? For this girl it can only perpetuate her fears and needs.

The other student, a young man, informally admitted that he has never finished a book in his life, not because he is not interested, but because reading literally nauseates him. He feels that if he were to read to the end of a book, he would throw up. When he told me this shocking story, I remembered that cars and racing are his hobby. I asked him if he could read a racing journal to the end. Yes, racing journals he "eats up." (Any English teacher who feels that the cognitive processes are of chief importance in the reading of literature should study this student's gustatory imagery closely.) It is important to point out what you may not wish to believe: this boy is very intelligent, quick, and perceptive. He is not an intellectual basket case. It took me more than a term, even in an atmosphere extremely conducive to honest student talk, to learn about his psychosomatic reaction to literature and learning. How can this student possibly go from conference to conference speaking about this painfully neurotic response to reading? First of all, he has no language with which to talk about it. And if he did have the language, he would lack the courage. Think what he would be confessing!

Now, I am convinced that a great many literature teachers would respond with deep sympathy and understanding to these two students. Why else do we read literature? But the question is, how often do we use our knowledge of human nature to provide a conference atmosphere which will free a student to speak truthfully about his response to the assignment? The two students mentioned here, let me repeat, would strike most faculty members as adequately prepared and competent. But when I spoke of these two students to some of my colleagues who do not know them personally, the teachers flatly refused to believe that the students were in any way "typical" undergraduates and referred to them as "fringe cases." But judging from the performance of these two students in all their courses, no teacher who "knows" them sees them as other than ordinary, respectable college learners.

I remember myself, years ago, in certain conferences with my teachers. There was reason for any teacher to believe that as an honor student I was confident and honest as I sat across from him. But I remember the many false fronts I was driven to wear as the result of false assumptions on the part of teachers, awareness of the reward structure in education, a sense of my own insecurity, etc. It chills me to think of myself as that boy, so inhibited by some well-intentioned teachers that I would not move my eye away from a slant of bright light nearly blinding me. Such was the effect of certain august faculty members who made one feel that one had to be there, at that level, seeing as much, realizing all that the professor himself knew about the work at hand. I think of that "confident" boy now as I confer with students, especially in an initial meeting.

How important it is to remember that the student in conference is more than one person. There is another person there, lurking behind the shutters in the acquiescent facade. This second boy may be feeling resentment against the older man or woman. What the student often really wants to know is how to jump over the stick so as to pass the course. He hates Tennyson (loves Donovan) and considers that a man who spends his time waxing eloquent over the power of those dull lines must have a very bizarre sex life. (The stu-

dent has only begun to read the assignment and will probably never finish it, knowing that, despite the teacher's threats to the contrary, *Cliff's Notes* will probably suffice.) At the same time, this voice, throbbing so loudly in the head of the body sitting there, smiling and nodding at the professor, is full of paradoxical impulses and painful insecurity. He really does want to learn something. "I don't belong in college. I shouldn't be an English major. I am a shit. I will never be like him—a Ph.D. He really knows his stuff."

As I think about conferences on both sides of the desk, I am aware of the degree to which I have wasted my time over the years by helping to create facades which destroy meaningful human relations and the natural learning process. How can one learn when one is busy doing a soft-shoe routine inside one's head? Professors tend to weary of conferences, blaming the students for misuse of the privilege, until, as Jencks and Riesman humorously put it in *The Academic Revolution,* the students "tell horror stories about professors who have office hours once a month in an ill-publicized place." Yet the conference could change the direction of a student's life and even a teacher's ideas. If the learning processes of a particular student are blocked because of personal problems, a teacher, whose goal it is to liberate the student intellectually and emotionally, may have to provide an atmosphere in which the student can speak openly and honestly of his obstructions.

Now listen to the hue and cry: How can we possibly get to know each student? Are we to allow ourselves to become engulfed in the private fantasy of every poor soul who sits in our classes? There is research to be done and lives to be lived. Who has the time to devote to such an enterprise? I am a teacher of literature, not a psychiatrist!

I cannot pretend to have satisfying answers to these responses. I understand and share the busy teacher's desire to lead his own life, pursue his own interests, and protect himself from the emotional bombardment of too many people in pain. But I am equally aware of the real demands of teaching. I respect my calling and sincerely believe in its human value. If I get weighed down by time-consuming

demands, I remind myself that no *good* teacher ever promised me that teaching would be easy. So when I can (and it does not always happen), I attempt to throw myself into the human currents. These are very personal decisions. I realize it is impossible to get to *know* anyone, let alone each student in a class. It is arrogant to believe that one is "inside" the experience of many people. And I am well aware that some teachers do not have the temperament for the kind of interaction I find so important in an educational environment. The more I open myself to my students' experiences and needs, in class and out, the more I am able to facilitate the emotional and intellectual growth of my students.

I am not advocating therapeutic tampering. We are not trained to *direct* the emotional lives of our students. What I advocate for those who find it possible is a receptivity which is in our best interests as teachers. I do not want to be engulfed by students' pains and fantasies, and I hope that I can be strong enough to control the degree of my own involvement. This is very difficult. Start *listening* to students and you often discover loneliness and fear. But if our interests are not enhanced and forwarded by sensitive contact with the people to whom we are teaching literature, then I think by remaining in the classroom we are doing a disservice to them and ourselves.

All of these remarks are partially unsatisfactory and can surely be of little help to others. But I know that when the urge to "teach" comes upon me, when I begin to worry about standards and how "they" will do on the Graduate Record Exam, my effectiveness in a class is palpably diminished, the glaze appears in the students' eyes, and I begin to resent them and myself. On the other hand, when I keep myself open to the students' needs, aspirations, and fears, and when I can share with them the direction of our mutual course, I find them and myself alive, spontaneous, and self-disciplining.

Perhaps this is the place to say that what I am advocating is not easy. Teachers who have attempted to de-structure their courses and to increase the possibilities for open discussion have often found that the students do not jump up and down, clapping their hands

with glee. Many students sullenly demand lectures and teacher discipline. Grades are called for as a "spur" to productivity. The students heap contempt upon the heads of their fellow students and "hate" to listen to non-authoritative comments in class. They feel they are wasting their time if they are not learning about "trends" and "movement." The teacher knows these things, the teacher is paid to impart them.

Facilitating human growth is difficult because so many culture-bound prejudices must be demolished, often at great pain to the student, not *before* but *while* the current educational process is going forward. The two processes—at least at this moment in history—must occur simultaneously, even organically. The teacher beleaguered by students who want more structure must constantly remind himself that these students are the *same* ones who, when they sit in lecture courses or false-Socratic discussions, are bored, listless, hostile, or dully acquiescent. No, our job is to help these students save their own lives. The effort on our parts does not match the effort involved in preparing lectures. So much more is at stake in helping others to live. It is tiring to maintain one's faith and commitment when the road is uphill.

In the next chapter I shall set down some specific ideas for creating a climate in a course. In chapters 4 and 5 I shall attempt to clarify, through the use of specific detail, how I envision the implementation of what must appear to you at this point as vague idealism.

If idealism is what this all sounds like, though, I may as well end this chapter with a swatch of the same material: the ideal literature class. Five to ten students sign up to spend part of the next months speaking about books with Professor Mandel. (The college catalog has no fixed course listings, just brief descriptions of some of the recent interests of each faculty member.) The students get together with Mr. Mandel and spend the first few sessions deciding what they would like to read, putting books on reserve in the library, agreeing on how they would like to arrange the external matters of the course, such as where to meet, how often, how long—

all open to immediate revision by a majority vote later on—and generally getting to know each other. The time is not wasted if the first week is devoted to setting a tone of friendly, unconflicted exchange, if the "normal" aggressiveness and competitiveness can be drained off and replaced by mutual regard and communal spirit. During these preparations, Mr. Mandel participates, but does not direct; shares, but does not control. Each participant brings to the group what he can and makes it available to the others. What Mr. Mandel brings is experience with groups trying to learn (this is most important), knowledge of many books, the perspective but not the wisdom of someone older than most of the class members, half-formulated ideas which the class may wish to discuss. (Completed ideas are convictions and have no place in this atmosphere of expansion and spontaneity.) But everyone in the class comes to realize that his own experience with books and people, his own perspectives and ideas are as valid and valuable as the professor's. All that is demanded of student and teacher is intellectual and emotional honesty. The course is devoted to discussing in depth and clarity, with intellect and poignant personal involvement, the works of literature chosen by the group. Needless to say, in my ideal course there would be no *required* examinations, papers, or grades.

I fear that this is beginning to sound like Happy Valley. But teachers of literature are entitled to an occasional wish-fulfillment dream too. Even if we are over thirty.

The last chapter ended on a note of fantasy. It should be clear that, for me, literary education would be immeasurably richer in such an atmosphere. While this fantasy seems like a Utopian dream, I am convinced that the currents in college teaching, the intellectual backlash to the persistent disappointments of the established methods, are carrying us toward such a goal.

It is not my purpose, however, to bolster disgruntled teachers with visions of what life may be like in Arden. What I propose are steps to improve the educational process in one's own classes. One can change the meaning, the means, and the goals of literary education. Unfortunately, in virtually all schools there must still be *some* subversion if we are to do more than introduce a few stylish flourishes into the present system (such as arranging the seats in a circle or running a senior seminar or introducing pass-fail into an otherwise traditionally run course). One must decide for himself the degree to which he can morally and ethically undermine the regulations of his employer in the name of genuine education for his students. Our colleagues, chairmen, deans, and presidents are no enemies of genuine educational advances. My goal is to impress upon them the astonishing success one

Setting a Climate: Some Ways to Do It

can have with only mild disruption of the ordinary university procedures. I have not yet, for example, blatantly disregarded the course-content expectations of students enrolled in one of my classes. If I have been assigned a course in Pope and Swift, that's whom we read; though I am not certain that this decision has always been the right one.

I wish to make some practical suggestions.

My advice has to be practical since the economic realities of present-day college education make it impossible for many teachers outside of small, elite colleges to work with tiny, self-selected groups composed of deeply concerned students. In the last analysis, each teacher must decide how to deal with the problems and resources available to him. If one keeps in mind, steadfastly and centrally, that only those pedagogic decisions which seek to keep the reading of literature a pleasurable experience are valid, the teacher will discover his own best ways, given his abilities and limitations, to foster those ends. What follows are the thoughts which have recently shaped my teaching experience in a very large, greatly understaffed university. Different teaching situations will obviously require very different ideas.

I do not believe in "classes," especially in large universities where so often many or most of the students do not know each other. Our present system turns students into competing enemies, though they sometimes form unholy emotional alliances against the professor. During pseudo-inductive "discussions" (where classes are not too large even for that), the teacher asks a question, waits for hands, then listens politely as a student gives, one hopes, a short, not *too* correct answer. If the answers are too good at the beginning of the hour, the teacher must spend time at the end dancing around the same bush, cramming in too many new ideas for one session, asking for questions from the class: as if one would have to solicit questions in a truly educational environment. In this atmosphere, students often resent the contributions of their peers. If a know-nothing speaks too long or pointlessly, the other students are furious because they did not come "to hear other kids, but to learn from the professor."

If an exceptional person has an answer for every question, other students sink into their seats, worrying about their own ineptness and the degree to which the bright student will set too high a grade curve. Most of the intellectual content of the hour will be ignored by perhaps even the majority of the students. The most competitive contributors are often out to get points and are not interested in each other's comments. Others simply do not hear.

In order to break down hostility and aggressive competitiveness and the accompanying emotions of hate and fear, the "class of students" must be turned into a community of human beings. The teacher's most important job is to get the students to voluntarily remove their semi-conscious masks: "the English major," "ingratiating sycophant," "imperturbable sphynx," "scholar," "all-'round, anti-intellectual cat." Behind these facades are human beings who can be induced to say what they really think and feel about what they are reading. Honesty, like cheating in a traditional setting, is infectious. Let one student speak openly about his self-doubts concerning his inability to understand "The Wasteland" and the floodgate is thrown open. Let one person, in this unaffected atmosphere, advance a tentative suggestion about the poem's meaning and watch the group grow interested, alert, responsive. Slowly the students discover that as a *group* they can come to some understanding of Eliot. If this process is repeated many times and in many places (there is nothing sacred about a three hour a week program and nothing sacrosanct about room #236), tolerance and cohesiveness develop among the students. They look forward to getting together with people they have come to know in their modern-poetry course.

The more we break down the idea of the traditional classroom setting the better off we shall be. Teachers who have their students sit in a circle are attempting to create human interaction. Open-ended meetings at the teacher's home or a student's apartment are certainly much better. Regardless of the setting, the situation should encourage natural movement in the room: walking, standing, stretching. Best of all, it seems to me, would be the situation that allowed the fortuitous coming and going of students in a workshop or tutorial

atmosphere. There is no evidence to suggest that students learn better in a fixed temporal and spatial setting, but a great deal of evidence that they suffer boredom and hostility.

The teacher's job—simple to state, difficult to perform—is to create the atmosphere in which natural fraternity and learning can develop. Our job is not to deliver information or even, really, to point out where it is. Teachers are not merely reference sources. As I understand my obligation to the students, I am a person prepared to work as imaginatively as I can to establish conditions in which students will *want* to learn. I create the conditions; they do the learning. A teacher cannot perform this function through advice or admonishment. No, it is much harder than that, and much more effective. The teacher turns his class, whether it is meeting in a traditional setting or more naturally, into a community; the difference is the removal of the masks. He divests himself of his own role whenever he senses that it is a defensive one: "expert" or "professional scholar" or "charmer" or "ironist." As the role-playing of the students often masks their self-doubts, these poses of the teacher occasionally cover his own insecurities—his fear of human interaction, his self-doubts concerning the road to wisdom, his secret suspicion that he is basically immature, or foolish, or fat, or forty, his defensiveness about how to affect the lives of students and his years-old investment in the System, however disappointing it has been.

The teacher must speak to his students, at once and bravely, with absolute and glaring honesty, about who he is, what he knows and does not know, his intellectual prejudices, fears, and loves, his expectations of the students and for himself. It is his *job* to dazzle them with something they never see in others and seldom find in themselves: naked truth. I find this frightening even to put down on paper. It makes getting a Ph.D. look like Monopoly by comparison. But if the "quest for truth" is to have meaning for us—isn't that why we chose our profession?—we cannot hope to achieve our ends by beginning in deception and hypocrisy. I have come to believe that if we want to fail ourselves and our students, the way to do it is to deceive them about what we know and think. For me the lie, the

invisible worm eating into my possibilities as a teacher was the mad need to perform, to put on a charming act. I have been trying to free myself of this particular pose. Slowly I am learning that it is not my responsibility to always leave 'em laughing and loving me. I have come to accept the view that any radical innovation will be undermined by a teacher overly conscious of the threat to his own position and authority. A man whose outer voice is an echo of the inner man can educate students better by traditional methods than the cool, arty teacher who tries to be what he is not and forgets *himself*.

There are enormous positive values in letting down one's guards as a teacher, especially in conference. While you are allowing the student to speak freely and honestly, he is, by the nature of the contact, feeding you lifelines not only to himself, but to his generation. It is inevitable that the teacher will lose touch with the student culture. Not every teacher will be willing to move into a dormitory for a week in order to reestablish contact, as a University of Nebraska professor recently did. But if meaningful education is to occur, a teacher must be communicating with someone who is there, not with a fictionalized memory of students from the '50s or '40s.

Before I share with you some specific ways for creating a learning environment, I must warn you that if you follow this pattern of friendly, unaffected openness, you should be prepared for some short-range and even some long-range hostility. If you speak to your students as you speak to yourself, some will, especially at first, resent you. But psychological resistance is neither a crime nor a sin. What it requires of us is sympathy and insight, not defensive hostility.

Resistance to education, like resistance to therapy, may take many devious forms. Occasionally, a teacher may detect that the students who most criticize the traditional approaches are the most trapped by them. Certain students, while speaking of academic change, continue to view "poorly trained" students with scorn and value their own level of factual information. I have observed that in an innovative setting many quiet students, including those distinctly looked down upon by their more articulate peers, are the very ones de-

veloping insight, sensitivity, and compassion. These students tend to function better in tutorial settings or unhostile ones. Where the climate is alive with aggression and competition, they quietly undermine it, as Jules Henry has written, "by doing the least they can rather than the most."

As I planned my first truly experimental course, I thought that, if I was indeed going to attempt new things, it was best to pull out all the organ stops at once. If the term proved that one or more of the audacious ideas were detrimental to the learning process, I could in the future avoid these weaker methods. Only in retrospect would I learn that my full-organ course would later seem like a tuneful harpsichord in comparison to what could have been attempted. My innovations, so shocking to some of my colleagues, now strike me as tepid. But rather than ignore this first experimental course, a description of how I tried to create an educational environment may be helpful to you. The course was the best one I had ever given up to that time. Indeed, by the end of the term I felt guilty for ever having taught another way. The successes and the failures gave me the courage to move more dramatically forward into innovative teaching.

The course was English 74, an honors drama course, the syllabus of which is traditionally designed by the instructor rather than the department. Thirteen students were enrolled, ranging from freshmen to seniors. The course was not restricted to English majors. Although the course was nominally "honors," the honors requirements at the University of Pittsburgh are so loose that I think it correct to say the group was not particularly special. Some students were in the course by my permission even though they had modest overall grade averages; others had merely signed up because they wanted an "honors" course. They were, though, certainly all competent performers by the usual academic standards, and a few were "freaky" enough to promise, from the start, the possibility of surprise. (In the next chapter I shall describe English 74 in detail; here I wish merely to provide the plan I followed for establishing a climate conducive to learning.)

I worked out a syllabus of readings. If I were to teach *this* course

again, I would let the class design its own syllabus, but this was my first attempt at innovation. The syllabus as an element with which to experiment never occurred to me. After Fergusson, I called the course "The Human Image in Dramatic Literature" and set up pairs or groups of plays which I felt would reveal how different playwrights over the centuries had treated the same dilemmas. Wishing to avoid questions or formal analysis and the like, I assumed we would discuss questions dealing with man's changing values over the centuries, his humanism in the face of the scientific onslaught, his psychology. I think I should say here that in subsequent courses I have stopped asking questions altogether, except when they are completely genuine —that is, when I do not know but wish to know the answer. Some of the play groupings were the Oresteian Trilogy/*The Family Reunion*/Euripides' *Electra/Mourning Becomes Electra; Beaux' Stratagem/Private Lives; Hamlet/Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.*

It was not long before I discovered—because the atmosphere was conducive to honesty—that the students did not need my grouping, that they had their own fascinating ideas as to what could be read in a drama course. We nominally stuck to my syllabus, but spent as little or as much time on a play as seemed profitable. The students chose not to discuss the Farquhar play, but spent extra time on Goethe's *Faust.* The selections may or may not have been imaginative, but now I see that they were designed to satisfy (1) *my* notions of what was worth learning and (2) the problems of book-store ordering. Much richer radical change was possible in this area. But more of that below.

Grades are what students work for. *Everybody* knows this. Even the "best" students, though desirous of meaningful educative experiences, work for grades. Why not? Grades are what we *give* for meritorious performance. The same assumptions underlie most pass-fail systems. The student must still take exams, write papers, *measure up,* in order to pass, or he fails. Teachers are forever telling their students not to worry about grades and then giving them nothing else to worry about. The faculty room is full of professors who deplore

having to give grades, but who give them. Loud is the professional lament over unseemly credit-hunting, but seldom does one hear the simple facts that the students' own professional futures depend not on what they learn, but on the grades they get and that the hunger for good grades is a trained response to a situation created by us.

I gave no grades in English 74. Off and on all term, I shared with the group as simply as I could the reasons why I would not grade or evaluate them or their work in the conventional manner. The reading of literature, I explained, is a private enterprise; it's one of the few activities in a technological age which one still does by himself. Its value is also a personal matter. We may choose to discuss what we read in or out of school, or we may exercise our critical, analytic powers in essays. But the experience of the reading—its power to alter or refine one's ideas or emotions—can best be judged by the reader. In the words of Herbert Marcuse, I did not want "the alien and alienating oeuvres of intellectual culture [to] become familar goods and services." And one way of avoiding this situation was by reducing the possibility of comparative evaluation.

The university requires that a teacher hand in grades at the end of the term. Since I was not ready to martyr myself by sending down no grades whatsoever, I let the students grade themselves. (There are of course alternative possibilities, and I have since used them.) If I had to acquiesce to a system I deplore, at least the students would have the opportunity to grade themselves by such standards as they felt were valid, allowing the A or B or C to symbolize whatever seemed personally meaningful or suggestive for the student. A grade need not only reflect professional competence in paper writing, I argued; it could reflect the effect of the plays on the reader's sensibility, the degree to which the reader was enriched or altered emotionally and intellectually, the impact of the course in a hundred different ways. At the end of the term I handed out the IBM grade cards and each student filled in the space provided for the grade.

Of course by traditional criteria problems could arise. A student could give himself an A for doing nothing, for cutting all term. A particularly ignorant student could give himself a high grade when

his work would indicate that he deserved a much lower one. The students could *use* the teacher and his lenience.

All these responses are irrelevant; you can imagine how often I heard them from some of my colleagues. I had tried to create an environment in which spontaneous education would flourish. If a student wished to do nothing in an atmosphere strikingly conducive to doing something—so be it. Let him have his A, if that is all he wanted. If a person with modest intellectual powers felt that he had had his head cracked open in English 74 and that light had flooded in, if he had decided that reading one or another play had aided him to self-identity, he deserved the A: meaningful education had occurred. My job was to encourage education in one and all, not to run a competition. If the kids were going to use me, well, it would merely be a reversing of the familiar tables. How long I had used them!

The removal of the grade pressure was the decisive gesture in English 74. I cannot stress this enough. The implications took a long time to sink in. The teacher had divested himself—no matter what chaos would follow—of power over the students. The point was to create an environment without standard evaluation and judgment, a scene in which anything could happen. Without the threat or reward of grades, would they do any studying at all, would they learn? I was convinced that the grade mongering in conventional courses is deleterious to true education and that no matter what happened in a group which had no such external rewards or punishments, it would be an improvement. At least the people in the class would have the opportunity to be themselves: no policeman was going to force them into servile postures. (One of my colleagues half-seriously refers to students as being in voluntary servitude. He thinks it is a good thing.) I had confidence that at least some students would find the air invigorating.

Since I was not evaluating the students' accomplishments, there was no reason to require any exams or papers. Even if I had assigned papers and exams, my self-proclaimed powerlessness over them would have made the work unenforceable. More important, I had come to

feel, as I have suggested in earlier chapters, that the traditional assignments too often produced artificial, academic stuffiness—boring and pointless in the extreme. At best a student writing on a topic he had not or would not have chosen produces a sterile, if elegant, exercise. For me such routine plodding spells the death of genuine learning. Furthermore, I had come to feel that students should not be bogged down with four or five courses of study at one time, where, in Marcuse's words, "the most contradictory works and truths peacefully coexist in indifference." In such an atmosphere, the students are forced to choose easy, lackluster topics because, on the one hand, they have no time to be consumed by a deep, burning interest, and on the other, they have to be graded in each course on their output, the finished paper. It is of sociological interest how many otherwise rebellious students, even SDS members, acquiesce to the demands of the paper-producing syndrome. I had the growing conviction that a student should be allowed to pick up an old project from an earlier course and to carry it forward in mine or to begin a long-range investigation that could not and need not be rounded off by a paper fourteen weeks later. Work in progress, almost unknown at the undergraduate level and certainly not encouraged, struck me as a particularly potent and useful enterprise. Rather than to demand more shabby verbal exercises, I decided to encourage "projects," allowing the students to decide what the term could mean.

Very often I would suggest projects that seemed stimulating to me. But no student had to do any project at all if he chose not to. Also I did not reject any traditional papers. If students were inspired to write an essay, I accepted short or long papers on any aspects of the plays. Or of things not connected with the plays or the course. The students could also, for example, hand in argued agreement or disagreement with points as they arose in discussion. That is, if they were timid in class but not bereft of feelings, they could produce a critique of the class or teacher's judgments concerning any of the works. I constantly invited topics and ideas from any member of the class for the use of any other member. Always I encouraged the stu-

dents to confer with me privately if they were hung up in any way which prevented them from carrying their ideas forward.

One project was the journal kept regularly or irregularly in emotional and intellectual response to what the students read in English 74 or any other course. I made it clear that, while I would be personally curious to see such journals, I was not requiring (how could I?) that journals be shown to me. Literature has the power to move a reader in poignant personal ways; if the student captured the experience in his journal in a particularly private way, he could keep those pages or the whole journal a secret. It was *his* education. I kept a journal too as part of my own education during the term.

Another recommended project was a close self-examination and analysis explaining why the student had an intense reaction to a play or discussion. Why did he love *Dr. Faustus,* when his best friend hated it? Why did yesterday's discussion of *Mourning Becomes Electra* give one student such a constricted feeling, even though she had enjoyed reading the trilogy? Why was the teacher's personal reactions to Ionesco's *The Chairs* such an excruciating embarrassment to the very student who had enjoyed hearing other personal reactions to the play? These kinds of questions became integral with the course itself. Papers on such subjects became virtually unnecessary.

Needless to say, I encouraged the free use of any imaginative talents: the playwriting of scenes, vignettes, whole works, works-in-progress. If their bent was oral, I encouraged them to take over the class, to "teach," if they felt such a project could be of personal use. Certainly they could arrange the performance of scenes, singly or in a group.

Many colleagues, occasionally even those who have been innovators in their own classrooms, have taken a dim, critical view of the utter lack of assigned written work in English 74. Recently the chairman of my department assured me that students may do no work at all if we do not pressure them into it. Some of the most imaginative teachers have suggested that a mild form of coercion stimulates student activity and prevents chaos: the omnipresent fear that the kids will simply disappear. These well-meaning colleagues

may be right. Indeed, the other courses I describe in this chapter do make use of minimum requirements.

My only defence of English 74 must rest with the results. Not every student handed in a project, and not every project struck me as imaginative. But in this free atmosphere more students did more self-disciplining projects than I have ever gotten in more traditionally controlled classrooms. And the demonstrable learning which occurred for virtually everybody would seem to justify the pedagogic decisions, at least for this particular group. Whether or not spontaneous self-discipline would continue to exist in a university dedicated to such a free-swinging curriculum, I do not know. Doubtless, the climate of experimentation and novelty excites students and teachers to new heights of personal achievement. But my experience with English 74 suggests that people want to learn. Free them from the pressures of hunger, cold, and sickness (including the kind of sickness brought on the mind by subtle or overt external pressures), and next they will want to know things: how an engine operates, how to manage a home or a business, how to read a poem. Presumably such a view of human nature is debatable, but the behavioral sciences are making it very clear that a human being may be expected to respond with astonishing consistency to repeated stimuli.

If teachers remove debilitating pressures and set no limits as to what may or may not be done, I believe that (1) it will be *natural* for most people to discipline themselves in some way and (2) the creativity in the classroom will increase dramatically. Those students who do not respond in such a climate, no externally enforced academic paper will effectively educate anyway. But I have come to believe that an astonishing number of students wish to experience the pleasures of literature. In the correct atmosphere literature will take care of itself—as it always has.

There was no way for me to know, as I sat at the long, rectangular seminar table the first day, whether the removal of *all* written assignments would end in success or humiliating failure. I was terrified of the latter possibility, but convinced that the structureless plan was worth a try. What prompted me to attempt such a bizarre

program was the belief, based on my own genuine learning experiences, that education itself, without external pressures such as exams and paper deadlines, was a painful process, though a good kind of pain, like crying one's eyes out at Morris Carnovsky's *King Lear*. My feeling was that education forces one to break one's mold, to disabuse oneself of comforting illusions, prejudices, and sanctuaries of the mind. It always left one suddenly alone, temporarily insecure and frustrated, but strangely desirous of more. Education, it seemed to me, left one confused and expectant, not satisfied and complacent. Just today I received a letter from one of the English 74 girls. In it she says, "Confusion is still at the center of everything in my own private world, but I've realized that this confusion is vital. If we understand our goals, our purpose, ourselves, what would be left?" She apparently has come to suspect what I felt on the first day of the course about the meaning of true education.

One further pedagogic measure of English 74 seems worthy of mention here. The course was to be nondirective. At least, I was going to try to let the group run itself. Each class meeting would take the direction of some student's particular interest that day. Never would I set the discussion going in a direction suitable to my own ends. I believe that this aspect of the course frightened me the most, as I sat there the first session, riddled with self-doubts. Not only am I a big yakker by nature and a didacticist by temperament (an "intellectual rapist," Erikson would say), but I tend to be frightened by silence. I have always felt driven to fill conversational voids. Verbalization is an ordering of experience; silence evokes terror of the unknown and unknowable. Nonetheless, I decided that the class would have to seek its own meaning and values; students would have to find their own words—another painful aspect of learning. I would not impose my rhetoric on them.

In this aspect of the English 74 tone I failed very often. Though I have gotten better at it, in English 74 I simply could not tolerate too 'ong a silence. And I was, as usual, more than a little in love with my own voice. But even though I directed more than I intended at the beginning, I do think that, with one terrible exception, I kept

my part of the talk free of evaluation, debilitating value judgments, intimidating irony, sarcasm, and censure. But if I spoke too much (that is, in violation of the tone I had tried to establish), at least I think *I* spoke: no *persona* fashioned my words in accordance with an ill-conceived academic model. My commitment to truth remained pretty much intact.

The shortcomings of the course stemmed from its essentially negative character. It experimented more by removing traditional obstacles to learning (grades, assignments, external direction) than by finding positive, imaginative pedagogic constructs of a new and vital kind. It was a step I had to take. I had to prove to myself that X and Y were neither sufficient nor necessary to true education before I could open my eyes to the virtually limitless educational possibilities. So much *did* happen in English 74 that the terrors of the first day were absorbed into the unbelievable thrill of an awakening for me. (In the next chapter I shall let the students speak for themselves.) It gave me the courage for further experimentation.

I shall provide two examples of experiments which grew out of the liberating experience of English 74: the first is a seminar in autobiography, the second a required course in the eighteenth century. Aspects of each idea are adaptations for my own use of the wild schemes of inspirational teachers I have known or heard about. I do not mean to take exclusive credit for these courses, nor do I want to suggest that they represent a final solution to the teaching problem. I merely wish to share with you some interesting projects designed to set a climate conducive to a kind of learning which matters.

The seminar in autobiography (itself a breakthrough in a rather routine list of course offerings) is designed as a graduate course, but I am sure that it could be run in essentially the same way for juniors or seniors. The seminar enrollment is restricted to fifteen by the department, though the plan for the course could accommodate as many as thirty. Nobody in the course has ever studied autobiography. Indeed very few students have read even the barest smattering of the world's most interesting self-studies: those by Augustine, Cellini, Rousseau, Gibbon, Montaigne, Mill, Yeats, etc.

In the past when I taught this course I assigned a long list of autobiographies, at least one a week and sometimes more, and in class attempted to draw from the students exactly what I had come to know about this absorbing area of literature through my dissertation and a handful of articles derived from that particular incubator. At the end of the course the best students could reproduce, chapter and verse, neo-Aristotelian criteria for judging autobiographies—the focus I had used for my Ph.D. thesis. The readings and the "discussions" were geared to follow this one prescribed direction. Obviously, such a plan produced a static situation for me, since I had already learned these things, and a restricting situation for the students, even if they never realized with how much they were not coming into contact.

What to do about it? The new plan calls for the fifteen-week term to treat only four autobiographies (actually five, but two of them are short and by one author): Henry Adams' *Education*, Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* and *Starting Out in the Thirties*, Malcolm X's *Autobiography*, Bertrand Russell's first volume, and, as a bonus, Frank Conroy's *Stoptime*. Each work, easily read in a few sittings, is the focus of three weeks' discussions. For each autobiography I put on reserve in the library, or better yet in a room set aside for the class, corollary readings representing four categories: classic autobiographies similar to the one assigned; autobiographical fiction; cultural documents of major importance but not geared to questions about autobiography; specialized generic studies. (One example representing each large category for a study of Adams' *Education* would be perhaps H. G. Wells' *Experiment in Autobiography*, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, Brown's *Life against Death*, and Roy Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography*.)

The graduate student is invited, in effect, to design his own course. He may wish to read many autobiographies or specialize in generic literary questions or become a "secret generalizer" (Leonard). He may read the books on reserve or any books he wishes. The instructor will never test him on his reading. He has plenty of time—three weeks on one book—to read what he feels will be of educative

value to himself. If he wishes to skim many books, he has the option to do so. If he wishes to labor over and master a hard book (one by Marcuse or Brown or Eliade) or a long one (Wells' autobiography or Spencer's—both over a thousand pages), he will find no course or grade pressure forcing him to abandon his project. If he chooses to do nothing, it is possible the instructor will never know. But it is the student's business, not the instructor's. In this course the students may satisfy a wide range of curiosities, bringing to bear on the week's focusing autobiography whatever background reading they have found invigorating and relevant. The teacher may act as a Rogerian arbiter or he may participate in the discussion. But he should not impose an order on the day's discussions.

In this course I have attempted to mingle the best aspects of the private tutorial, the bull session, and the classroom. Instead of meeting three days a week for one hour each day or three hours on one afternoon or evening, the autobiography seminar meets in a workshop atmosphere. One day a week the course meets from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in a comfortable room, preferably in the library. The students and the teacher come when they care to, stay as long as they like, leave, return later or not at all. No one need remain if he is bored. Instead of cooping up sixteen people until the bell rings, each person in the class may exercise his right to exchange his ideas on the subject at hand whenever he chooses to during the day. In other words, only as his mind is willing to focus on questions concerning autobiography need the student participate. Between 10 and 5 he will be able to find from one to fifteen people who have been reading more or less widely and applying their studies to the same core book. If he arrives when the teacher is out (eating lunch, teaching another course), it will serve to emphasize that (1) the learning *experience* does not depend on the teacher, and (2) the peer group is capable of setting its own terms for meaningful discussion.

Doubtless the discussion bogs down from time to time during the day. But when it does, one who has been doing another kind of background reading can sharply turn the attention of the group in a new direction. Or one can leave. Life is short. Boring time drags.

The student who is disappointed between 10 and 11 a.m. may come back after lunch and find the instructor and three or four students talking more pointedly about issues of interest to him.

At first glance this plan may seem like a mad scheme. But it is certainly less crazy than the conventional college classroom: controlled discussion from Pavlovian bell to bell; students, who may think better walking around, forced by circumstance and convention to sit uncomfortably for an hour or more without cigarettes or food; dull classes a veritable prison; exciting discussions suddenly unravelled just as the tempo is picking up; the teacher forced to be the focus of attention even if his body is in pain and his mind blank; deadwood floating in a stagnant pool of words. Surely more joyful learning can occur in an atmosphere which is partly tutorial and partly communal, and, after a while, extremely natural—an informed bull session at which participants can eat lunch, mill around, and take temporary control of the direction of the discussion. Outsiders always welcome. And they will come.

Unlike English 74, there are two projects required for this course. The graduate students are not only being educated, they are also being certified as "professionals" by the institution. Or so goes the argument. Self-grading would work as well here as in English 74, but I used a grading procedure which I believe is at least humane.

The first required project is the writing of an autobiography, or part of one. Obviously this project cannot be graded, but it must be done before course credit can be given. No problems here: everybody wants to write about himself. A self-portrait is assigned for two reasons: (1) It involves the student in the real, rather than the abstract, problems of the genre. He will learn more about the literary challenge of autobiography in his own attempt than he ever could by reading Pascal, Shumaker, Morris, or me on the subject. (2) It gives the student of literary art a chance to try his hand at something artistic. As Jencks and Riesman urge in *The Academic Revolution*, the student of literature should at least attempt the art he will be professionally criticizing. "Many would not perform very well, but that is not the point. We are not suggesting that every Ph.D. in

English should have to compose a passable sonnet—though that might be more sensible than requiring him to read Anglo-Saxon. What we are suggesting is that nobody should get a Ph.D. in English who has not *tried* to write a sonnet. . . . Writing papers and examinations about other people's art is one device, but writing about one's own experience and vision is another and not necessarily less effective one." The students are encouraged to work all term on their autobiographies and to share in the workshop atmosphere of the meetings the problems that they confront in their attempt to write about a life which is still being lived.

The other required assignment is designed to certify the student and to educate him. Each student is invited to decide what he would like to do to demonstrate his competence in the area of study he has been pursuing. My goal is not to trap him in ignorance, but to provide an opportunity for him to pull together what may be disorganized impressions and ideas. It is the student's privilege and obligation to decide when he should be tested and how (theoretically, he may have his "final" during the first week): he may have a written exam, an oral, a term paper, a few short papers, mixed-media presentation. He may even ask to have his grade based on his leadership of discussions during the meetings. No grade is final until the student is satisfied. This plan frees the teacher to say honestly what he feels about the work without fear of damaging the student's professional career. If the student disagrees with the evaluation or is unsatisfied, he may try again the following week or month or year. "Incompletes" accepted. No stigma attaches to the student who wishes to pursue his education at his own pace.

In this permissive atmosphere it seems likely that students come to know and respect each other. They learn because they are self-motivated, enjoying what they read—the prerequisite for meaningful learning—and reading what they enjoy. The relative freedom to name their own terms encourages them to *be* themselves, that is, to open themselves to experiences that can change and redirect their lives. Much less effort than usual need go into a tinny facade—a professional *persona.*

No doubt my assumptions and general methods are abundantly clear by now. Rather than repeat in detail the features the course in eighteenth-century literature shares with the autobiography course and English 74 (honesty, non-direction, reconsideration of grading, etc.), I shall get to the specifics at once. It is a large class, perhaps forty to sixty majors, virtually all there against their will. When I get such a mob I can either try to devise an educational program for them or I can quit. So far I have tried to find ways of getting to as many of them as possible. The eighteenth-century requirement is very unpopular with undergraduates. Traditionally, we drag them screaming through an anthology or series of Riverside neoclassicists from Dryden to Johnson, with wistful sidelong glances at Cowper, Collins, Gray, Smart, Young, and others. Too many teachers of the eighteenth century devote themselves principally to matters of repugnance to modern students: influence of Juvenal and Horace on Pope and Johnson; the conservative morality of the period; elaborate discussions of satire and its uses; the metrical genius (the sound and sense) of these masters of the heroic couplet. Professors may find these topics pregnant with value; they certainly feel that students should be "exposed" to these writers. Most students are bored stiff. A young lady once wrote for a professor at Carnegie-Mellon University:

> Nothing so true as what you once let fall:
> Most English majors don't dig Pope at all.

the competence of which does not necessarily belie its sentiment. Most teachers of the eighteenth century have not taken to heart the words of Robert French in his recent *College English* essay: "Somewhere there has been a failure of communication: the students have not learned, or the teachers have not taught, the essential thing about poetry, that its value depends, finally, upon its effect on the reader. Unless the poem engages the reader, and somehow alters his perceptions, of what use is it?"

The new eighteenth-century course restricts itself to four authors —Pope, Swift, Johnson, and Cowper. Another grouping would do as well. Rather than stress the typical literary questions associated with

the eighteenth century, the goal of the course is to get the students inside the heads of these writers. What does it mean—ethically, morally, emotionally—to see life as Pope saw it? What did the world look like through his eyes? How would you and your world have to change for you to see what Pope saw? What kinds of frustrations led him to write such bitter and scathing satires? What visions? If Pope fails to speak to you as Ginsberg does, what is it in Pope that turns you off? And related questions of this stamp.

But I believe it is pointless for a teacher to stand before a class and ask these questions. The course methodology—deeply indebted to and imitative of a course in library science at the University of Pittsburgh—divides the class and the term into quarters. Each group of students chooses one author whose works are discussed during a quarter of the term. If the instructor explains what he wants and then leaves the class for the rest of the hour, the students may be expected to arrange the details as they get to know and like each other—that is, as the tone in the room becomes conducive to a rich, communal experience in education.

There is no syllabus for the course. The members of the group decide how to parcel out the readings among themselves, so that, as a group, they will have read virtually the entire Pope canon or that of Johnson, Swift, Cowper. The rest of the class—those not chiefly responsible for the work in a given quarter—also have the freedom to choose which literary works they will read, though as the quarter progresses they will most likely choose those most often discussed by the leading group. During their quarter of the term, the group is solely responsible for running the class meetings. I have had great success with this plan of freeing the students while giving them a general sense of responsibility. The students decide how they wish to convey what is inside their man's head; it is their job to run the class day in and day out. The other students, from their own perspective on the reading, may challenge, debate, accept, or reject. The teacher, whose main job has been to set up and maintain a learning environment, is present to encourage, listen sympathetically and responsively, to operate as a reference source, not to criticize, censure,

or endorse. Like a psychoanalyst, the teacher may, figuratively, sit behind the couch, outside of the range of the searching and the stumbling. He may work on the conviction that it does the students no good whatsoever to hear the "truth" from a teacher or to be admonished by him or praised. More and more I believe that there is nothing one needs to *know* about literature. One's education comes from a confrontation of sensibilities (the author's and the reader's) and of value structures. The reader must be free to interact with the poem at whatever level he is ready to do so. The teacher, part psychologist, part sociologist, must help each student to discover himself in Pope or Johnson by removing obstacles, clarifying what the student has said without altering it, and responding warmly to the student's struggle toward understanding.

The group teaches itself. One student helps another: a community forms. Available to each group, besides the major works of their author, are approximately 100 titles on reserve in the library: literary studies, historical accounts, biographies, works of general, cultural interest. Nothing is assigned. The group must decide on questions of relevance. Since the teacher assigns no specific "homework" for anybody, each group can utilize its time as it sees fit. The teacher walks in, sits down among the students, makes no attempt to structure the discussion. And for their work they get, at the end, a group grade—one of two grades each student will have at the end of the term. (The teacher may wish to confer with the other three-fourths of the class on the appropriateness of one grade over another for the group. And I guess I should add that in this class, as well as all others for which the institution demands a grade, I favor blanket As or self-grading. But I am trying to suggest options for those teachers who feel that they are not ready to divest themselves altogether of the evaluatory role.)

The course may have two "final" exams, one in the middle of the term, the other at the end. For the first "final," the first two groups (probably the Pope and Swift specialists) make up jointly the exam on these two Augustans for the other half of the class. In the last week of the term, the final two groups make up and administer

the exam on Johnson and Cowper for the first two quarters of the class. For both exams, the teacher—who has been the neutral source of information and encouragement—grades the exams. The questions are not his: he has no axe to grind.

There is reason to believe that the grades for the course will be high. First, a group grade tends to coalesce around the sharper, more motivated members; it allows those who are intimidated by grade pressure or who are sincere about their educations, but not over-bright, to do as well or as much as they can. All in the group are free to learn, if they care to, because a high grade is pretty much a sure thing. Second, since the students are making up tests for their friends, one can expect fairly regular "leakage" of the type, if not the actual content, of the exams. Everybody will have heard a great deal about the exam before the event and will have prepared quite specifically to act on the information he has received. As a result, there should be a considerable amount of useful, pointed, informed discussion of eighteenth-century literature before the exam. Also, the fear of a low grade, usually the result of not knowing "what he wants," should be considerably less threatening. The teacher may stipulate, as a further attempt to free the atmosphere for learning, that no one can fail the exam. An incompetent performance merely creates the need for a make-up exam. The point is to educate, not to punish the wicked or stupid.

The teacher need not worry about being labeled a pushover or an easy grader. By the end of the term, it is clear that whether the students grade themselves or are graded in a liberal, positive way, or even if they get no grades at all (as in my fantasy class of the last chapter)—the point is that most students have learned more than they thought they would. Some of those who signed up just to get an easy A found that the course has been an enjoyable experience; the students have gained insight into the meaning of Gulliver's and Rasselas' lives; and they all have gained, if not the literary jargon used in informed discussions of the period, at least some of the *Sprachgefühl* of the eighteenth century. If we must grade them on this, doesn't it deserve an A?

I do not think that these three courses have solved the problems of higher literary education. The major evils of the university remain. The grading system destroys the bloom; the large classes crush the roots. If the eighteenth-century course had fifteen students, rather than sixty, many teachers today would probably feel comfortable giving a blanket A or allowing self-evaluation. But if a class is large, and intense personal contact between student and teacher is impossible, the grading system of the eighteenth-century course here may be a passable stopgap measure. If the university insists on at least nominal traditional strictures, the autobiography course or English 74 may provide some workable maneuvers. But for me these three courses are halfway houses on the way to the fantasy evoked at the end of the last chapter.

I believe in the power of the truth to transform the world. The present technological world is one of miracles. Or so it would seem to Praise-God Barbon, Boetheus, or Warren Harding. Is it too much to urge that the learning environment of my fantasy need not be inhabited by evanescent Oberons and Mabs, but, someday, by real teachers and students of literature in American colleges and universities?

Three students in Honors Drama, English 74, wrote the following words. These quotations (as well as those cited throughout the chapter) are exclusively theirs.

> Student One: I don't contribute regularly for different reasons. Sometimes I feel that many people are acting in a very pseudo or insensitive kind of way and then I feel extremely alienated from almost everyone in the class. Sometimes I have thoughts that I just can't articulate in an intelligent, meaningful way. . . . So, if I reveal my deepest feelings and then they were crushed in five seconds by three words, I would be left with nothing.
>
> Student Two: I love to contribute—feel stimulated by it. So I do. [And yet] . . . it may even be I'm describing what I'd like to see rather than what I am. Self-deception is the name of the game. . . . There's so much about me that I don't want these people to know—or I don't think that I want them to know—that only a part of me is here.
>
> Student Three: There is this spectacular girl with black hair and a fantastic body who sits near me and has a lovely husky voice and looks jewish. . . .

One need only keep in mind that these thoughts are real, that they pass through the minds of people in a classroom

while a teacher may be speaking of classical drama, in order to imagine how far all teachers must travel if they are to speak to the students where they may be found. Because so much personal revelation appears in the student writing for English 74, it is possible to trace in some detail the reaction of certain people to the course at different, key times during the trimester.

This chapter does not provide a program for a successful course. Indeed, you may feel frustrated by what may seem like an evasion of concrete answers for real, pressing classroom problems. But the whole point of liberated teaching is that it relies heavily on the students' daily needs and cannot be mapped out in advance except in the broadest terms. Hopefully it will be of help to you to hear real students relating some dramatic personal moments in English 74. The details of the course will speak, more or less, for themselves. I believe that either a student responds to something happening in the room or he may as well be elsewhere—in an environment which will engage his heart and mind. You must judge whether the quality of the student's response and activity in English 74 warrants considering it as a reasonable substitute for conventional course structures.

As I sat nervously outlining the course the first few days of the term, the three students quoted above might have been thinking such thoughts. (Actually, of course, they wrote their comments somewhat later.) What were the others thinking? What would they think later? All looked more or less interested, but perfectly capable of drifting off into private reverie, like thousands of other students I had taught. Here was a teacher telling this expectant, semi-suspicious group that he would give no papers or exams, record no grades, and leave the direction of the class up to them. How would such a plan work?

On the first day, Sam strikes me as alert, witty, outrageous. His long yellow hair hangs down toward his slouched shoulders. He pretends to be vaguely detached and aloof. Sam is not going to show astonishment at my effort to speak openly and honestly. His, I am to understand, is a world in which anything and everything happens. No English teacher is about to threaten this complacency. Across

from Sam is Grace, almost blending into the surroundings: short, unaggressive, pert. With her plain pastel sweater and skirt, she looks like a student who would dutifully execute any academic task and could find something "educational" in the most tedious lecture. When she speaks in class, I can barely hear her. I decided that Grace, aiming to please, can produce acceptable academic work at the expense of vitality, social involvement, and personal fulfillment.

My initial impressions were, of course, superficial. Though I soon learned that these two students were unique, complex, multifaceted, and talented, they continued to represent for me two such different sensibilities that they became polar, archetypal representatives of major student types: Sam, the imaginative, erratic creator; Grace, the methodical, disciplined producer. Sam, the Romantic; Grace, the Classicist. Perhaps they even felt that way about themselves. What was going on inside their heads at the beginning of this experimental course? I shall quote at great length.

> Sam [recorded in a journal after the first meeting]: Let me recount what has happened. That will be the best way to present this to myself. . . .
>
> Sitting there chewing toothpicks waiting for class to start . . . building up a lovely disdain for all the other kids (this asshole next to me sees a girl with a French book opposite him and says, "Ah, Mademoiselle, vous parlez francais?" and she giggles and says, "Un peu."), a couple of New York girls come in dressed, as they say, fit to kill, and they know each other and talk. The girl across from me looks like a prim library type. . . .
>
> Sitting there chewing toothpicks waiting for class to start. . . . Enter Mandel. . . . This wild, manic person (I'm thinking) . . . what a delivery! Staccato . . . bizarre mind leaping all over the room. . . . practically electric head, really moves fast. But mostly the way he talks so rapid-fire like the clothes salesman who talks your mother into sportcoat with 3-inch too-long sleeves. . . .
>
> Naturally, I'm as intimidated as hell and start cold sweating (a reaction you know you produce and believe you don't mean to and that I'm messed up if I feel that way. . . . but you really love it tremendously and when I get over it and start competing, you'll

fight like a champ to put me back intimidated) wow I'm a bona fide paranoid.

But, you know, that brings me to the crux of it all . . . what I was thinking about. . . .

Because: There is no grade to worry about in this educational situation. . . .

Ergo: There is no reason to compete with the other kids in the class as I have been (all of us have been) trained to do all our (my) lives (life). . . .

All right, here's this weird Mandel asking us all our first names and talking about affectation and pseudo-intellectuals and I'm thinking here's a real sickie. I started worrying that the course was going to be retitled English 74: Group Therapy, and I started thinking, "Oh Christ, you mean I'm going to have to get to *know* all these clods?" (superiority feelings being one major defense against the world . . . but then, I hardly have to tell *you* about that, as Mandel's adolescence and college career go flashing across my mind). Do you have nightly visions of a round-table discussion with a bunch of raw, exposed psyches . . . beings reduced to their Absolute Essences?). . .

Anyhow, wouldn't this honesty you're looking for have come naturally once we start discussion and getting into the literature? What you've created is a classroom full of incredibly self-conscious people. . . .

I pick a little fight ("there's such a thing as being hungup on affectation. You've said the word fifty times since you walked in here.") and you give a quick defense and act as if you scarcely heard me. (By this time I've draped my body all relaxed-looking on my chair and have on this fantastic jaded, world-weary, slightly contemptuous expression which you either entirely miss or perceive as an upset stomach. . . .)

(My armpits were making Niagara Falls and I really *was* trying to feel comfortable in that chair) feeling excited (should I be letting you in on my enthusiasm so soon? Far better to play it cool with most people these days. . . .) still, it will take weeks of composure and Right Guard before I feel comfortable in that room.

One thing about the Mandel Happening that I've been thinking about is the position you think *you're* taking in all of this. If you

aren't adopting the position of class autocrat with control over the destinies of our GPA's, does that mean you are taking equal status with us? Of course not. Friend (just one of the gang)? How can that be—what if you can't stand our guts? It would seem that (by elimination) you see yourself as Guiding Light. OK by me.

The mixed feelings of happy surprise and suspicion—directed more at his peers than at me—defensiveness and almost childlike anticipation were not unique to Sam. Granted Sam is extraordinarily sensitive and hyper-verbal; nonetheless, I was to learn that his ideas were shared, more or less, by many other students. Sam's response reminds us that a student sits in class judging, worrying, testing, defending, attacking, mocking, encouraging, and perhaps praying—regardless of whether he looks bored, contemptuous, or "with it." In English 74, especially, everyone found the opening meetings unsettling. Discussing the degree to which she would have wanted me to direct class activities more than I did, Grace says about her early impressions—

> At the beginning of the term we frequently spent a few minutes of the period trying to determine within what limits Dr. Mandel should direct the discussions or "lead us on" to certain conclusions. At this time the general reaction was that teacher direction was to be absolutely minimal—that it was to be totally our responsibility to lead the discussions. Yet it seemed as though the more we attempted to define limits, the more impossible it became to do so. As the trimester progressed and we became more involved in the literature itself, the problem was more or less intuitively worked out. It seems that if the tension of a teacher-student relationship can be minimized, as it was in the informal set-up of the class, any opinions or questions of the teacher can be accepted and considered on basically the same level as those of the other students. It's as if teacher direction is replaced by teacher participation. When the teacher is enthused by a particular aspect of a certain work, he has as much right as any student to "monopolize" the discussion. This is in no way the same as standard "teacher direction." At the same time he can be available, as "teacher," to explain certain aspects or provide certain information when asked to do so.

> At the beginning of the term I suppose that, unlike many others, I would have wanted greater teacher direction. Discussions sometimes started slowly and I would have preferred more direction from Dr. Mandel.

Grace goes on to speak of her "original reservations about the possibility of self-direction in the class." She found the opening sessions of English 74 somewhat unnerving. Too much time seemed wasted through non-direction. Many students express concern about wasting time. Lacking sophistication about "psychological time" as opposed to "chronological time" (what existentialism differentiates as human time and world time), many students—and teachers—assume that time is well spent if every moment is devoted to information gathering. The same students who sit hostile and inattentive in traditional classrooms will often demand the repetition of the same conditions in all other classes. Time spent in exercises designed to flex the mind or in human interaction is considered lost or wasted.

Characterizing the remarks of both Grace and Sam is the sense that the unconventional approach to the course initially produces both doubts about its effectiveness and curiosity as to its outcome. Neither student can decide whether to be pleased or chagrined. Both immediately indicate their awareness that their peers may be able to teach the instructor something—though Sam is not sure they can teach him anything. Both students are willing to participate. For Sam the desire for involvement seems to stem from a response to the personality quirks of the instructor. ("I always thought it would be great to have made friends with a prof. . . . I've never done that, but I'll bet it could be all kinds of rewarding and educational.—So maybe *that's* my motive [in keeping this daily journal].") Grace, on the other hand, looks forward to a class which may provide her with fresh insights into literature and a chance to test her own hypotheses. For all the students there was the scary feeling that in a course where "anything goes," anything can happen. Our common desire to find out what *would* happen made all of us eager for further meetings.

In a classroom without a map or rudder, many problems can

occur. These difficulties are in themselves instructive, paradoxically bringing to light in the most glaring way many of the causes for failure in the more conventional classroom. The students in English 74, sensing that the course was as much theirs as mine, agonized along with me over the problems and worked toward rectifying them. By the end of the trimester these problems were virtually gone. *The process of overcoming human obstacles standing in the way of learning became an emotionally satisfying aspect of the educative process itself.*

One problem—unnerving in its frequency at the beginning—was the group's inability to self-start. Most of the students read the plays and came anxious to talk, but their insecurity and fear, the by-products of years of schooling, kept them intimidated. Everyone would want to start the discussion, but no one would. Then they would desperately turn to me. As one of them wrote, "I usually prefer that anyone who has an interesting point for discussion lead the class. . . . But I really depended upon Barrett [the instructor] to carry us over uncomfortable silences, to have something pertinent to say. I'm not sure if that's the way I'd want it, ideally, but it's a kind of relief for me because I always feel guilty for not saying something . . . when there's silence. . . ."

I wrote in my journal early in the term: "The real problem of this class is its inability to self-start. Everyone is very self-conscious at the beginning and today we never got off the ground. Barbara expressed frustration at the end, and I agreed." Barbara, an intense, brilliant, thoroughly neurotic student and one of our few early "starters" later in the term insightfully recognized that she had been contributing regularly in class for the very reasons which kept others silent: fear, a sense of unpreparedness, self-doubts. But even she would not take it upon herself to start the discussion every day. "Very interesting," my journal continues, "all students—especially students like these—always condemn 'conformity' and middle-class values. But given a setting like English 74, congenial to non-conformity, and everyone is terrified to start talking. Why has no one taken as a project the starting of the class? Why must the 'teacher' put ideas

or initiative into the minds of the students? 'You talk too much,' Barbara says to me. But when she has the opportunity to start a discussion, she giggles. How does one encourage these people to rise to the occasion without destroying the occasion? Final question for such a group: 'It's *your* education: what do you want of a teacher?' "

One student told me in conference that she saw how I suffered when the class would not self-start. She promised "to get me off the hook" as often as she could. I considered this a meaningful project in English 74. It meant that this student would do the reading and marshal her responses in a way that could lead to group discussion. She often did help us out. She writes, "I'm not one for desiring much direction. I think the teacher should be available as an integral part of the discussion and a source for more data. . . . Direction should come by strictly forcing [!] the kids to start and maintaining that as a rule. Even if it means the teacher must ask someone to do it. It would result in much more varied focus for discussion." In retrospect it seems that the "self-start" project may have been the decisive gesture in loosening other tongues. (I have since learned that there are many ways to help a discussion self-start. One way, for instance, is to break up the class on the first day into permanent sub-groups and ask each sub-group to run the course for a week in any way they see fit. This device has worked well enough in a subsequent English 74 class.)

Another problem apparent early in the trimester was intellectual lassitude resulting in superficial discussion, shallow observations, and evasion tactics. Even in this first free seminar, I was, of course, aware of the values inherent in a free-wheeling, inexact but ideological discussion. Joseph Katz has written on this subject in his impressive study *No Time for Youth:* "The adolescent is much less a theoretical person than he is an ideological one. He likes to work with great ideas, and his concepts are closely related to his emotions and hopes." But something about certain discussions rang distinctly false. My intuition told me that on occasion the talk was more likely latent resistance to real grappling with ideas and feelings than a valid savoring of experiences, concepts, and emotions. I favored and en-

couraged open-ended, oceanic discussion, believing with Professor Katz that "if we encourage the student's own experimentation, we will find that sooner or later he will want to refine his concepts, and test some of his ideas, either by established methods of inquiry or by new and possibly unique ones." But even a teacher who believes in the educational value of bull sessions may be able to tell the difference between an enthusiastic, though vague, ideational "rap" and inauthentic, verbal dissipation—latent panic. The temptation to "teach," to direct the discussion along useful lines is especially strong at such times. What one *should* do is not easy to determine. But I am convinced that the worst thing I might have done in English 74 would have been to let my sometimes intense frustration push me to give up the idea of the course. After a trite or worthless hour, I would express my frustration in a personal way. Without consciously trying to impose my professorial will on anyone, I would speak of my own dissatisfaction. The discussion had not helped me.

One such early discussion was about the nature of art's universality—a hash of tired tidbits, each student trying to outdo the others with superior wisdom. The same topic came up spontaneously near the end of the term. The difference was remarkable. The students, though still oceanic in tone, were unaffected and sincere; as a result, many worthwhile things were said. Another early discussion, this one on student politics, had me clamping my jaws together with rage and disappointment. Here we were assembled to talk about Aeschylus, the climate perfect for rich literary discussion, and one girl led the group into a diversionary topic: student power. Most of the class seemed to resent the direction the discussion had taken. I said nothing during the whole session, but voiced my disappointment at the end. Much later in the trimester and after some particularly raw treatment from me and the others, the same girl was to write, "I came to the decision that I had to make some differentiation between talking and saying something; and listening and hearing; and reading and understanding. Since this momentous realization I've been trying to really hear and understand."

Not only vague generalizations and evasive irrelevancies worked

against the grain of English 74. (To a large degree I was, of course, to reevaluate my own notions about what was vague and irrelevant or merely untraditional or novel for a classroom.) Another problem arose during excited, pointed discussions of literature, though *I alone seemed to suffer.* On 16 October I wrote in my journal: "We discussed *Dr. Faustus* and I was frustrated, though I don't think they were. What our conversations lack is background material—either on the period or the theater. Is this necessary? Can't information about the Elizabethan period or about blank-verse drama be of as much interest as the play itself? How should one treat this material so as to avoid tedious academic talk? Maybe I'll ask them on Friday."

I did speak openly about my feelings, making it clear that (1) I was not insisting that we look into the traditional concerns, and (2) I was not even sure if my apparent need for more formal background material wasn't my own dubious training asserting itself as a "norm." The students, who had enjoyed their discussion of *Dr. Faustus,* did not respond enthusiastically to the idea of imitating their more predictable English classes. Nonetheless, Sam volunteered to read and report on a recent *PMLA* article on *Faustus* which I had mentioned.

The next day Sam reported. He had understood and condensed the article, which was on Christian and mythological elements in the play. His intelligent delivery precipitated an enjoyable give-and-take on the play, and the hour flew by. So the "background" session had its value, but only because—and this I must stress—it was seen to satisfy a real human need. In this case, mine. In comparing English 74 to courses in the conventional format, Sam wrote at the end of the term:

> One of the reasons that the traditional system has been maintained for so long is that . . . everyone believes that there is a correlation between [the traditional lectures, papers, discussions, etc.] and student production. The assumption is that the assignment, the paper, the test are ways to force learning and production. This course proved to me that, for me at least, that is not the case. The situation was not forced, so all motivation to produce was personal. What is particularly interesting about this fact is that, although

> one would suppose that a personal motivation would only create a personal kind of production, I found that a personal motivation also created production along traditional, academic lines. The important thing is, then, that my production for the course was *both* academic and personal. Along academic lines, I wrote a short essay on comedy and tragedy, reported orally on a scholarly *PMLA* article, and most important, prepared myself each class session by carefully reading the literature. Along more creative lines, I began to write a journal which I still keep, wrote a little poetry, and rehearsed my interpretations of parts when we had readings of the plays.

Sam's personal success does not answer questions concerning the role or importance of accumulated literary and historical data in an undergraduate English course. It merely suggests that in a free atmosphere students may surprise teachers and themselves by working meaningfully on projects which would seem, in other settings, like onerous tasks. I frankly do not know whether background material is necessary where its absence is not felt as a loss by learners. I may or may not succeed in making such background information interesting in the traditional lecture, but I do know that however I may entertain students as I attempt to insinuate this material into their minds, I do not usually make this information *theirs*. Sam's report on the *PMLA* article was part of his education. The factual material he imparted to the students will probably not help to shape their lives. They, like me, have no doubt forgotten every detail of the article. But for Sam it was a memorable experience. *More and more it seems to me that one cannot predict what will be of educational value. All one can do is create an environment conducive to self-directed exploration and discovery.*

I do not wish to minimize the problems of English 74—lack of direction, evasive tactics, insubstantial discussions. Nor do I wish to gloss over the fact that, at first and even until the end, there were signs of intolerance, cliquishness, hostility, which could be very painful to the more sensitive students. "I was low and depressed today," I had to write on 18 October. And as late as 25 November I found myself writing, "Is the course a total failure? The whole class is con-

fused and unhappy today." I do not wish to falsify the picture. But as I record these problems, I am aware that instead of eating into the entrails of the course, they served a beneficial purpose. The group was able to isolate its problem in ways uncommon in human relations. If there was intellectual evasion, we came to be able to label it "evasion," and did not pretend that it was meaningful discussion. If there was intolerance of one group or person for another, all students tried to deal with it, both public and privately.

"I'm so very intolerant," one student wrote, "that the degree of more tolerance would only be in a very relative sense. I usually don't want to be around 'dumb' (non-intellectual) people. This has been a personal hang-up for more than four years and this course has shown me that others are also intolerant. I resented not being 'tolerated' at times, but at least I learned what the other side was like. . . . I close my mind when ideas aren't close to mine. But here it was easier to accept them at other times—maybe because there wasn't any 'wrong' or 'right'—maybe because we made an attempt to really listen to each other. I actually cared to hear other peoples' reactions. . . ."

I want to record two errors of judgment which seem to me to have been most detrimental to the growth possibilities in the course. On two occasions I acted in ways grossly out of keeping with my goals for English 74, not to mention decent human relations. I find these extremely painful to describe, but there would be little value in describing English 74 if I did not stick scrupulously to the truth, revealing the pitfalls of such an enterprise.

The first serious error was my sudden, and for her, traumatic public labelling of one of the girls as basically a "B" mentality. I realize how shocking my error in judgment must strike you in this context. I make no excuses for myself, I assure you. Yet need I bring to mind the fact that a good part of a teacher's day is usually devoted to such evaluations? Under any circumstances labelling of this kind must lead to unfortunate consequences. In my course dedicated to the proposition that evaluation is detrimental to growth and in which no one had had to sustain an evaluation for weeks, this sudden, crass

labelling of a student's ability had the impact of a psychic explosion. While the tone of English 74 suggested that there are no limits to the possible personal growth of an individual, with one word I stunted a student's growth. Don't aspire too much, I seemed to say. You have your limits, you know. You can only be good, adequate, nothing outstanding. Needless to say, I did not mean to imply such limitations, but as soon as the letter "B" escaped my lips (revealing, lamentably, how trapped I was by faith in my ability to judge others), I saw her face and recognized how much damage I had done. My purpose had been to rock her gently from her cool complacency; instead I crushed much of her initiative and spontaneity. No one learned more about education that day than I did.

On another occasion I allowed myself to lose neutrality and even became dishonest. Seeing that events of a play reading were taking a turn that struck me as detrimental, injurious to my pedagogic ends, and personally threatening, I responded defensively by pulling away from the confused needs of the class, protecting my own damaged ego, and even lashing out childishly at those most "responsible" for creating the problem. Attempting to "fix" a particular pedagogical method that had worked well on a previous occasion, I turned the students into actors, not playing parts in a play, but playing, as it were, themselves in an earlier play reading. In short, I had invited disastrous role-playing. What had been spontaneous, natural and cordial on the first occasion became, the second time, stilted, affected, and hostile. I had created the problem, but could not admit it. (I think it is George Dennison who urges teachers to refrain from repeating teaching techniques in an externally imposed, artificial manner.) Without the detachment and strength to confront the class with my true emotions, I falsified them and withdrew myself from the group. How the group survived this tasteless blunder, I do not know. It must have had something to do with their awareness that I too was learning, sometimes the hard way.

In a conventional classroom, once a tone characterized by poses, hypocrisy, and sham is firmly established, poor pedagogical decisions do not cause much new emotional chaos: cunning, suspicious minds

are not easily shocked. But in a course whose contract requires honesty, openness, and friendship, a breach of the rules may be disastrous: the contrast is too much to cope with. "What is there to be learned from this painful experience?" I asked myself that night. The answer—so easy, so difficult. Be honest. Say what you feel and think. Be who you are. Trust the class.

A common, growing awareness that a classroom experience is really incredibly complex led most of us to the conviction that as people were increasingly capable of recognizing that there was no limit to what they could personally experience and that the efforts of others were sincere and worthwhile, the best climate was established for an honest, open discussion of literature. One student recently wrote to me that she had come to realize "for the first time that many of us were experiencing the same kinds of conflicts, needs, joys, frustrations, and just general inner confusion." In other words, the educational process stimulated by English 74 continues after the course has ended.

Not everything was problematic. I would like now to turn to some sessions which I feel demonstrate, in their fruitfulness, the richest rewards of a system which trusts the students to *want* to learn without coercion, lectures, or other traditional prods.

On October 2nd, we had our first real breakthrough. Everyone spoke except Betty, a particularly troubled and troubling girl. The discussion was about the farmer-husband in Euripedes' *Electra.* Had I planned a lecture or a series of questions on *Electra,* I am certain that I would not have thought to mention the princess' husband, except perhaps in a passing reference. There would not have been "enough time." But my students were nineteen and twenty and vitally interested in the way people use others sexually. I wrote that night, "Who would have thought that a vibrant, intellectual discussion could grow out of that? Thank God, the class is not structured by me. I would have trod the old ground again." I do not remember who introduced the subject, but the students were clearly all immediately fascinated, not only by the moral questions concerning Electra's blatant, inhuman use of her humble husband (this interest

led to a discussion of the Greek value structure; for this they turned to me), but also by artistic questions: "Why would Euripedes create such a character in an otherwise spare plot? What is his function and purpose?" These two approaches to the farmer—moral and aesthetic—opened up rich veins for a discussion of the play as a whole. The students were excited by their insights; I discovered that even the back door may lead to the front reception chamber. I was also to learn that I did not always know the back door from the reception chamber.

On the same day I wrote, "What I am learning about these students is that they all have personal intellectual and emotional needs. Through the 'projects' some of these needs can be satisfied. Today Vivian handed in a poem, an emotional response to Eliot's *Family Reunion,* which we read before *Electra,* and Bill submitted a philosophical manifesto." Vivian, the tenderest blossom I have ever been aware of in class, naturally would write poetry, rather than an academic essay. And silent, enigmatic Bill? As he was leaving the previous class, he had begun to talk with Tom and others, and spoke for two hours about the relationship of his personal, religious philosophy to the works we had been discussing in English 74. At the end of the course he wrote, "I owe Tom thanks for one of the most stimulating discussions I've ever had." Was this not a valid project? After this satisfying conversation, Bill, deeply imbued with the spirit of Christian mysticism, sat down and, because he could not help it, because ideas and emotions had fused and demanded expression, produced thirteen pages focusing on the Oresteian Trilogy and Christian karma. I found the paper "very fascinating," his ideas "impressive," even though I feared Bill was forcing Orestes into a preconceived mold. "Instead of letting him tell his own tale (with the help of Aeschylus and Athena) you seem to want him to tell your tale" via "mysticized Christianity." But I also reluctantly admitted to myself as well as to Bill that my worries about his views—"Do you find karma at work in all literature . . .?"—probably stemmed from the fact that my perspective, distinctly irreligious, could not accommodate such a view.

The two unsolicited projects handed in on 2 October—the poem and the manifesto—put into perspective for me how cruel or indifferent I must have been in my earlier, conventional courses, in which I never would have known of the existence of two such quiet souls as Vivian and Bill. "How could these two people—very different 'types' —have been satisfied by a lecture or a traditional question-answer approach? They clearly could have learned something about literature, but wouldn't that 'something' have been cut off from their human needs? Neither Vivian nor Bill suffered in producing these projects." I felt that both projects could have been better, but I did not say so to the students. Instead, I recommended to Vivian the poetry of writers of similar vision, while to Bill I spoke of Christian philosophers, principally Kierkegaard. I wanted Vivian and Bill not only to learn and grow, but to develop a benign frustration "at the slow pace of acquiring perfection." Perhaps such frustrated self-awareness is unnecessary to true education. About this I am still unsure, though, increasingly, I tend to feel that it may not be necessary. I do not suggest that all learning need be easy; some may be tough, a continual struggle to control recalcitrant materials. But I more and more doubt the validity of the view, expressed recently by one of my colleagues, that a student may occasionally need to be dragged, kicking and screaming, through some ritualistic educational experience.

October 7: "I feel that we have reached an exciting peak today. I walked in and found the whole class discussing the play—O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra.* My appearance made them slightly self-conscious, but the discussion continued. Every person in the class contributed, except, I think, Bill. Some of the girls who never speak had a lot to say today." Here was English 74, speaking like members of the erstwhile "intellectual community" about O'Neill's use of Greek sources in the fashioning of his own trilogy. Most memorable—I wonder if anyone will ever forget—was one student's awareness that a dream of hers was comparable to Orin's. In five minutes of personal talk about her dream—the kind of "digression" seldom to be tolerated in conventional classes—she tapped the Jungian arche-

typal patterns which have kept Aeschylus alive and vivid for thousands of years and which energized O'Neill's huge creative talent. The student became one with Orestes and Aeschylus, Orin and O'Neill. I knew that this was what literature was all about. Many weeks later, time enough for all to have forgotten everything that happened on 7 October, another girl wrote of her enthusiasm for the English 74 discussions, and as an example falling at once upon this "dream and its correlation to the Greek tragedies." She continued, "Some of the ideas expressed really made me think about the subject [as] if it had never crossed my mind. [It made] me examine my own ideas very carefully." One boy wrote that though he had read *Mourning Becomes Electra* before, the class discussion opened up the play "as if I had never really read [it] before. . . . So much more was brought out. . . ." The dream stimulated the whole group, and the discussion was free enough for Sam to stand up spontaneously to use the blackboard for a point he wished to make and for Barbara to read a poem she had cut out of the newspaper and which had struck her as relevant to the O'Neill play.

That hour went too quickly, as if there was not enough time for everyone to say what the symbolic dream had caused to press against the back of his own understanding of the O'Neill play. When it was time to leave, everyone moaned. Of course it is impossible for me to provide a program for this sort of thrilling classroom experience. It rests on confidence that the students are capable of illuminating thought and desirous of intellectual experience.

One of our most rewarding meetings occurred one night at a student's apartment. Sitting on the floor, drinking beer and eating pretzels, we all read Noel Coward's *Private Lives* and listened to some of his phonograph records. As an English teacher, you know how painful even prepared readings can be in the traditional setting. Students stumble over words, intonate as if English were their second language, and in general destroy whatever educative value there is in reading aloud. "After initial embarrassment," I wrote later that night, "the reading went very smoothly, with everyone putting his all into interpretation. The most impressive revelation was that of

the brains and talent of Betty, whose name I wasn't even sure of before now."

More opaque than our mystic, Bill, Betty would never have made her mark on us and for herself had a situation conducive to her self-expression not arisen. The rest of us sat there flabbergasted, as Betty, through her superb performance, taught us something about the possibilities in the play, while she also taught us that we had been doing her a terrible disservice all term. I do not wish to imply the Pollyanna notion that an effective play reading or any academic project can change the personality of a human being. Betty has huge personal problems, and English 74 was a painful experience for her—even to the point where she felt that perhaps she should avoid other literature classes in the future. Very torn, on the one hand she says, "I have not gained as much from this course as have (apparently) others," and then on the other hand, writes, "I'm sorry now that the class is over and sorry that I did not let myself become more involved. I do tend to want to keep things inside, even though it is an important value for me to try to communicate with others as honestly and openly as possible." An unhappy, sensitive girl, Betty had us, for an evening, realizing that she was talented and intelligent. Who could argue that such an experience lacked educational value for Betty and the rest of us? If the study of literature is to be defended as a cultural ritual, this communal endeavor and psychic initiation rite was more to the point than the tedious intoning of condescending praise of the Masters one hears up and down the halls of Academia.

I shall terminate these descriptions with one last account of what I consider to be an extraordinary session: 8 November. We had been discussing *Hamlet* for a few days. A few days before the 8th, I did something unusual: I lectured on the play for the whole hour. The lecture was entirely unplanned and spontaneous. The play happened to help me find the words to express some intense emotions I had been struggling with recently. Very moved, I let myself speak through Shakespeare's play. Like the reading of *Private Lives,* this lecture was effective because it was spontaneously satisfying real human needs. Mine. That night I wrote, "Today's lecture was the

best I've *ever* given, but at what physical and emotional expense! Is it worth it?"

On the 6th, Barbara started a lively discussion which continued energetically for one of those fast hours that I had come to expect in English 74. What kept the discussion about Ophelia and Laertes as children of Polonius so lively, I think, was that most of the students were eager to lock horns with me over some directly conflicting views. (When I gave grades, I used to think that students were honest with me. The English 74 experience taught me the difference between student-honest and honest.)

As good as these two session were, for very different reasons, the next session—November 8—seems to me to represent an ideal, one made possible by the climate of the course. Like all English teachers, I had been recommending throughout the term some of my favorite poets and novelists; on November 8th, Barbara came to class carrying Hyam Plutzik's *Horatio*. I had spoken highly not of it, but of *Apples from Shinar*. Barbara had been reading poetry as an English 74 "project," enjoyed Plutzik, stumbled on *Horatio,* and thought it meaningful in the context of a class discussion on *Hamlet*. Because she was timid about reading any of it aloud, Sam and I read the first two Horatian dialogues for her. The class seemed to find Plutzik's Horatio a valuable commentary on Shakespeare's.

I was pleased that Barbara had read a poet I had recommended, especially as he related so well to the current classroom discussion. But to my amazement, another student also had a copy of Plutzik's *Horatio* with her. Two students—as different from each other as Grace and Sam—had independently (they were not in the same social circles outside of class and never saw each other) responded to a teacher's casual book reference and were "working" on similar projects. It was hard to doubt that, however dissimilar these two students may have been, both were reaping rewards from English 74. In another course I had *assigned* Plutzik. The students, unimpressed, wrote competent papers. Here the students, in an important sense, had found *Horatio* by themselves and Plutzik had worked his will on them.

So on 8 November, the class session on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* began with an unplanned reading from a modern poet. It is easy to understand why the hour was ideal. The mere fact that two students had spontaneously brought in the same unfamiliar poet intrigued everyone else and established a dynamic tone which carried us through the hour's vivid discussion. You will understand that there is no Methodology to reveal here, no "program" for success. Learning occurs most dramatically where there is self-motivation.

Perhaps these descriptions have given you some idea of the group participation and enthusiasm which made almost every hour fly by, which kept attendance high, and which—though the hour was unstructured in the extreme—was educative as few classes are. I *taught* almost nothing, but everyone learned a great deal. While the literature occasionally lost its power to focus the discussion (one day I wrote, "We indulged in group therapy, but without a psychiatrist. . . . The literature has become irrelevant"), for the most part, the discussions ecstatically fused our personal needs with the enduring messages of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Goethe, Ionesco, Pinter, and the other playwrights. *They* had done their job, and we had enjoyed, felt, and changed.

Although it may be heresy, I am convinced that the projects were the least educationally valuable element of English 74, though certainly of varying value depending on the student. I am not saying that projects were not helpful, merely that other aspects of the course tended to preempt them. It will be in order, however, to record a few random samples of the work produced for a class which required nothing, since many teachers, understandably, will find "output" more central than I do and will want to see the "results" of English 74.

Some students, frankly, did little that showed. Though even in this unproductive segment—four students—there was a wide difference between the kind of "little" they produced. For example, Betty, who probably did the least outside work, claimed that she only read a few extra plays, while another of the four speaks of projects she "wanted to do but didn't": a journal, "a slide tape

showing the humanness and intensity of the characters and experiences in works we read," two papers on interesting subjects. This same student, however, did hand in one longish poem and was reading recommended poetry. I have no way of knowing whether or not English 74 would have been richer or less valuable for these unproductive students had they worked more. They each speak of great involvement in the class, even though they did not produce significant projects. I am inclined to think that these students would have probably profited from the right sorts of outside work. But since I did not (and do not) know how to encourage self-motivation toward a meaningful project, I felt it was better to leave them alone. I believe that not everyone one meets in a course is there at his optimum educational moment. This is, however, far from saying that some students are uneducable, which I simply do not accept as valid. Other courses or private experiences may be draining off his interest from the tasks in your class. Why worsen the experience for him and perhaps for the whole group by introducing external pressures? And surely some students may be learning or growing even if they are not producing measurable work.

Other students responded enthusiastically to the self-directed projects:

> Grace: I suppose my main project was to continue in my reading on "language" and to convey the new ideas . . . to the rest of the class. [Grace, prepared as no student I have ever known before, had twice taught a spellbound English 74.] In high school I did a great deal of reading on the various international language movements, from the time of Descartes on. As a result of a sociology class last year I became concerned with determining the limits of language as part of the methodology of the social sciences. . . . When Cassirer was . . . recommended in class [i.e., English 74], I took the opportunity to continue with some of my reading. Cassirer's *Language and Myth*, Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, Steiner's *Language and Silence* were perhaps three of the best books I have ever read on the subject. I can't tell you how involved and excited I became in reading these books and attempting to relate

> the movement toward silence in literature with the nature of language itself. The additional reading I did on the Theater of the Absurd was fascinating. As a result of reading the article by Hassan on "literature, language, and civilization," I have added at least a dozen books to my list of "must be read's." In addition Langer's work has given me a feeling for the nature of music, art, and literature which I had never experienced before. I intend, of course, to continue reading in this field. . . . I have also written a few papers, usually involving a personal reaction to one of the works considered or to a class experience.

It should be noted that the least of Grace's projects were "a few papers" on "works considered": the very heart and substance of most traditional courses. Grace wrote these papers easily, naturally, and spontaneously while pursuing a long-range investigation of another subject. There is no implication that she had to grind them out or that the writing was tedious or meaningless. As for her main project, it took Grace a few weeks to accept the fact that in English 74 she would be *free* to continue her studies in an area which had interested her since high school. But once the realization took root, nothing could stop her. An intellectual interest which might have faded, had she been forced to shelve her private studies in favor of required assignments, became an obsession. Grace was fascinated with the absurdist plays we read toward the end of the term and because of her ongoing studies in language and symbology was able to understand them with sophistication virtually unattainable to many students. How many of us would love to have graduate students capable of the energy, range of interest, and intelligence of this once-timid upper-classman?

Tom was a freshman. Through some fluke he was put into English 74.

> After discussions of the Oresteian Trilogy, I dug up some notes I had written when I first read it and compared them to what I felt now. I got out some literary discussions on *Electra* at the library and read Sartre's "The Flies" [not in our syllabus] and Gladys Schmidt's treatment of the Electra legend in novel form. I also

wrote a paper in which I paraphrased the Trilogy in terms of some of the problems initially facing our course such as adaptability and not being tied blindly to the usual educational teacher-student patterns. [This clever parody entitled "Pro-Establishment Bound" revealed an understanding of the Oresteian Trilogy as well as insight into the nature of our burgeoning group interrelations.] . . . After "Family Reunion" I got out collections of Eliot's poems. A lot of times I would feel the *need* [my italics] to write a paper to state how I felt, but we would discuss it and the need to write something disappeared. I was about to write about man's fate and determinism when Grace, Bill, and I stayed after and discussed it for two hours. For "Mourning Becomes Electra" I did some background reading on O'Neill's life in hopes of understanding the play better. . . . I read Sophocles' version of the Electra legend.

I handed in a paper on "Faustus" and "Faust" on the idea of whether Faust was really a Renaissance hero. . . . After "Private Lives," which we had a lot of fun reading aloud, I got out a Noel Coward record from the library. . . . My main fascination with *Hamlet* this time was with the glorious language and so I spent a little time re-reading passages and memorizing others. . . . I started to write a paper [on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*], but again I talked about it with Sally quite a bit and the paper didn't work out. For "Homecoming" I read some film criticism on screenplays Pinter wrote for films I saw such as "Servant" and "Accident." . . .Because of Sally, I read two books by Capote and saw *2001*, and because of Linda, I read Sartre. . . .

Tom is perfectly aware of the enormous amount of work he did, and he knows why he did it. "Lecture halls and spoonfeeding . . . are personally frustrating. They deal with a kind of limbo of facts floating around and you do what's expected of you. . . . However in our class, when we were interested and involved we far surpassed what would normally be expected of us and learned so much more this way." What comes through in Tom's remark is his sense of communion with other class members: *We* did this and that; *our* class; meaningful conversations with friends wrestling with some of the same problems. His accomplishments were part of the group's;

and a communal success was his. Notice also how little the instructor figures in these joyful learning experiences.

For projects many of the students read books they had long wanted to but had had no time because of "school." I considered this extra reading particularly valuable. Too many college papers are written in an intellectual and emotional vacuum. Besides reading Plutzik, Barbara read at least six other books, including Thomas Mann's *Faust* ("because of stimulation by Goethe and Marlowe") and Sylvia Plath's *The Colossus*. Another upper-class girl wrote poetry, kept a journal, and "organized an at-home French discussion of a play, modeled after our English 74 get-togethers." She also includes as projects going to Olivier's *Hamlet* and joining a university discussion group on education and the community. A freshman student handed in two papers, taught the class once ("a disaster of an attempt," she calls it, though enormously daring and rewarding for a freshman in such a course, I would add), and read five books only tangentially connected to the course material. Yet another student wrote poetry and a paper on "Dr. Faustus," "where I tried to solve some of the problems presented in that work about sin, with questions I had about my own sinning and about the 'Ancient Mariner.'" She also taught the class more than once and acted as a "starter." To all this, she adds, "I did most of my 'projects' by talking to friends, to Barrett, and in other courses, where I found my writing getting freer and more honest."

One student—Alan—deserves special mention. Alan reported on some research he had done concerning democratic vs. authoritarian classes, a project which, lamentably, reflected his unhappiness with the course. He was the one openly discontented member of the class, especially suffering under the course's lack of professorial direction. Studying in preparation for a law degree, Alan felt that a course should provide information ("data"), and the teacher should provide expertise in a particular discipline. He genuinely liked but one class session, and that was my impassioned lecture on *Hamlet*. After that meeting, Alan approached me, ostensibly to express thanks. He took the opportunity to launch into an attack on the idea of English 74

and the people in it. He found the procedures too therapeutic, too emotional (a poor substitute, he argued, for sensitivity), not intellectually detached and analytic enough. The call for honesty infecting him too, he admitted that he despised the sorts of satisfactions experienced by Sam and his type and went on to say that he disliked the "WOW" mentality and had never felt "WOW" about any piece of literature in his life. My reactions were mixed. His description of the course was, by and large, accurate. And, of course, he was correct in saying the course had been useless for him, since he had not been influenced or changed by the English 74 experience. (I am not one of those optimists who believes that *any* reaction, even a hostile, negative one, is a sign of progress.) On the other hand, I emotionally resisted Alan's criticism because, unlike the other students, Alan seemed dull and fixed, a middle-aged lawyer before his time, a conservatively dressed, well-spoken eighteenth-century gentleman. Not my type. In other words, from my perspective Alan seemed an "unreliable narrator."

My temptation is to write Alan off, to call him uneducable in experimental surroundings, to say, "Well, you can't get to everyone." Another, weaker temptation is to admit that Alan—and others like him—thrive on standardized, authoritative teaching. Both responses strike me as psychologically reasonable; that is, I think these responses to Alan and his complaints are "normal." Yet something inside me, perhaps the dim tracings of my own struggle for liberation over the years, suggests that had the educational environment been even better established or thought out, Alan, too, might have thrilled at new awakenings within him. I do not know what I should have done to draw Alan's particular energies into the group more effectively (he cut a great deal of the time) or to help him see that even *his* life style, motivations, and goals could be profitably scrutinized. To open one's eyes, to see, is to change. Alan did not. And perhaps I, in relation to Alan, did not either.*

* A recent grapevine rumor has it that Alan has been saying that he *feels* as if he did learn something in English 74, but he is not sure what. Good news from the provinces?

At the end of the term, the students composed a set of questions for an evaluation of English 74. The sheer volume of paper used in responding to the questions was staggering. Tom handed in what amounted to ten handwritten pages; Grace handed in almost twenty pages; indeed, everybody handed in long, thoughtful responses. Two exceptions: Alan unfortunately did not respond at all, though he promised he would; Betty wrote tiny, vague answers, but then a few days later, chagrined at her own inverted mini-answers, handed in a scrawled four-page explanation, which began, "Reading these evaluations [I had made them all available to the group, who spent the better part of a day reading and discussing them] has made me realize a number of things about myself. . . ." Even the course evaluation had a markedly educational effect on the class members.

Answering this questionnaire was an absorbing and frustrating project in its own right. Various exasperated students came to my office loudly lamenting their inability to find the words to answer or even approach the questions. There was no doubt in anybody's mind that the course had somehow stumbled from dubious beginnings ("Naturally, I am intimidated as hell . . .") into a rich, unforgettable experience. But how to capture the meaning of that experience? Every evaluation tries to find a suitable verbal construct to express the personal value of English 74. Even the student whom I crushed with my evaluatory judgment was able to write, "Whatever this class's value is I'm not sure. But I am sure that it is something new and alive and important in what I've found to be a rather dead experience—the University."

At the beginning of this chapter I quoted Sam and Grace at great length. It is fitting that I let their words end the chapter. In English 74 I found these two representative "types" move closer together, Sam indulging his more latent academic tastes and Grace opening herself to new, creative ventures. These two remarkable people seem to have found the words which sum up the almost religious experience of virtually everybody in the class.

> Sam: The course has proved something to me that I always believed was true, I guess:—that education is most important, most educa-

tional when one is emotionally involved with it. Since education always comes via other people, what could be more valid than an educational experience given from person to person?

Unfortunately, most "school experiences" . . . are not oriented this way. There is something wrong with an educational system, when, on the last day of one's senior year, one is *glad* to be free of it. There is something lacking in traditional education when one is not happy with it and instead feels happy when it is *over*. I have never left a class before with any kind of regret at its ending.

. . . . . .

This course . . . provided an alternative to the traditional. However, I do not feel that this is where its merits lie. The whole orientation of the course, above and beyond providing this alternative, was toward a fulfilling, deeper appreciation of great dramatic literature. There is no objective data in this area that would describe the way or the extent to which the course succeeded in this. Because I have felt differently towards literature as a result of this course, because I have been thinking of literature in new, exciting terms, because whole vistas of appreciation and understanding are there, I know that the course has [been] . . . real education.

. . . . . .

Yesterday was the final meeting of the class. Not surprisingly, there was genuine regret and sadness that it was over. No one who participated in it wanted to leave the classroom—almost as if, by just remaining in the seats, that time would not move and that the course would not end.

There is something *right* about an educational situation when students are sad to have it end, when it has been so enjoyable that its conclusion takes some measure of joy out of one's life.

Grace: Although this is rather vague and broad, I suppose I could say that I have never questioned my position and my purpose in such a way and to such an extent as I have as a result of this course. The literature played a vital part in all of this. We read some really great works [she lists them] and each one touched off new questions or re-expressed certain basic ideas which are very essential and important to me now. Each drama sort of "melted" into the next and I saw and shared in a certain continuity of thought and experience what I had never even envisaged before. . . . I've felt the

fear that I have had "alternatives" but not choice—and I marvelled ... to find this same fear in Aeschylus—that man so often "puts on the harness of necessity." I became increasingly concerned with developing some sort of inner freedom—an ability to become less compulsive, less meticulous, less concerned with the mechanics and more with the feeling. At times I have never been more confused in my life. Yet I wouldn't exchange the feeling for anything else.

. . . . . .

This year it's become clear to me that people seem to be insincere, superficial, or trying to make an impression only when they are forced into certain defensive roles. With any relative freedom, with any lessening of the sense that they are being constantly evaluated and categorized by every other person in the room, they become more free to speak sincerely—to get beyond platitudes. They become *worth* listening to. I think that this is what happened in this class. It's dismaying to think how little I would have understood the ideas of some of the people in this class in another "defensive" situation. I never realized to such an extent that no matter how different the ideas and goals and "life style" of another person might be, there is still a common ground of certain feelings and concerns. If one can only get in touch with this common ground, if they can "watch one another not out of fear" . . . it's not so great a step to being open to one another's ideas. The structure of the class gave us some freedom; the literature—the means of achieving this common ground. I feel that for me this class was at least a "start" in achieving greater tolerance.

I really don't feel that anything I have written can adequately convey my feelings about this course. At times I am not even sure of the nature of this course's effect on me, let alone am I able to express it. All I know is that it has been a most meaningful and unforgettable experience.

The day after Grace handed in her comments, from which the ones I have included are a mere sampling, she came into my office with the following addition, complaining that she was disappointed with the verbal inadequacy of her earlier responses:

"For one full trimester I felt as though I burned. I knew the feeling of being really alive—of being torn nine directions at the

same time—of living on more than one plane at any given moment. . . . I felt torn between two worlds in this class. . . . I'm pulled by the desire to actively make the break which has mentally occurred during the past few years—to reach for the flame and the confusion and chaos and to break all ties with convention and order. I have often thought that I might have been happier if I had not gotten near the fire—if I had never been able to feel modern drama—if I could go through life living in some neatly ordered little system where everything had its place and I implicitly understood my role and position. The question's irrelevant now. I have no choice. I've been gradually introduced to the chaos—to the experience of "living on more planes than one." I can't go back. I've lost my sense of security and understanding but I've gained a feeling of awareness and life that is immeasurably more meaningful and significant. I've gained this partially through the literature and my reading on language, but, perhaps more importantly, through discussing the literature with people who have had or seemed to have had similar or more intense reactions and were capable of expressing them well. The experience has left me much more confused and bewildered than I have ever been in my life. Yet somehow I feel it has left me a much richer person.

I cannot pretend that these words do not move me—even to tears. I cannot pretend that they do not make me beam with pride, happiness, and fulfillment for my role in making possible the kinds of experiences they capture so movingly. It is because of what happened to Grace and to Sam, and, I am convinced, to almost all the others, that I have taken the time to tell you about English 74. It is because I stopped "teaching" and started "listening" that these students were able to begin to relate, in Grace's words, "feeling to form, meaning to mechanics, emotion to reason." Very recently a teacher friend of mine hotly protested that he did not think we should be catering to the needs of students. For the life of me, I cannot see what else I am hired to do.

The past four chapters have expressed my conviction that, on the one hand, too many English departments encourage technical specialization, competitive professionalism, bureaucracy, and anti-humanistic boredom, while, on the other hand, they hold within their grasp the opportunity to enrich the lives of students and faculties in unprecedented ways. Other collegiate studies provide methodology for the world's work (engineering, accounting, home economics) or attempt to isolate verities and laws of nature for the enlightenment of society (psychology, history, sociology, even philosophy). While study of these fields may be personally satisfying and elegant mastery of their disciplines inseparable from artistic experiences, one still feels inclined to recognize a distinction between them and the "fine arts": music, graphic art, and literature. For the skills of a psychologist, home economist, physicist, and anthropologist are marketable. No matter how much personal pleasure an anthropologist may get from his private studies, his scholarly training has still prepared him to *do* something in the world. His mastery of the rudiments of his field is testable by outside specialists.

As I see it, while the writing of literature may be socially useful, the reading of it has no testable function in the

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external world. One may turn psychology or philosophy into "literature" by making its study unutilitarian, purely general and pleasurable, unconnected to any activity in a profession. Conversely, literature may be "used" by historians or psychologists without reference to its affective power, as psychologists have used Cowper's poems to learn something specific about mental disorder. But when a man sits down with a poem with no professional use in mind, he is the reader for whom literature is intended. There is nothing marketable in one's mastery of a poem. I am, of course, assuming that the poet did not write the poem with the intention of having it taught in school, that the teaching of literature is as separable from the literary experience itself as the teaching of linguistics or psychology is from their professional use by scholars and technicians.

Like the other arts, literature either does something to the reader or there is no value in reading it, as Thomas Mann himself urged. While there may be value in knowing about literature (its genres, periods, and the like), there is no demonstrable connection between such knowledge and the deep appreciation of individual works hoped for by the authors and expected by devoted readers of literature. On the other hand, there is manifest marketable value in knowing about physics or business administration—that is, a generalized overview is of *use* to the devotee in these fields. But even in the teaching of literature, let alone in the reading experience, there is little evidence that breadth of general knowledge increases effectiveness in the classroom.

For me there is no future in reading, though there is a past. One may choose to teach as a way of staving off starvation, but there is nothing inherent in literature which paves the way to a particular job or niche in life. English teachers do not study "teaching" in graduate school. The experience of literature is always Now. The effect on one's mind and heart takes place now, though the alteration created by deep intellectual and emotional involvement may be permanent. "Lycidas" or "An Essay on Man" do not have to be relevant in the way that Malcolm X's *Autobiography* or existential psychology are, but they must be read to satisfy a human need at a particular moment. Every real reader has had the experience of turn-

ing on his own to a difficult author (Milton, the later Yeats, Joyce) and finding an intellectual joy in the mastery of the text—a joy inseparable from the pleasure of reading Hemingway or Mailer in other moods. The experience of Milton occurs when one's *need* to read him is great and one can find satisfaction at the proper pace and with the proper mental equipment.

Although reading literature does not provide tools for the world's work, the experience often jolts a reader out of complacency, sweeping him into uncharted emotional and intellectual adventures. He may also find aesthetic delight in an author's craft: every piece is handmade. The jolt to one's sensibility may make one more receptive to "possibilities" in one's own life. The student who is studying to be an engineer, physician, lawyer, or teacher (of literature or mathematics) profits from these profoundly pleasurable experiences, but today gets them too rarely in school. English teachers should view as desirable a pedagogy which attempts to serve these pleasurable ends.

English department reform is badly needed, even now as we are in the throes of perfecting our imitation of other fields. What this reform should be is not easy to say. Perhaps my advice will not be welcome. All I can urge is open-minded consideration of the following points. Let me begin negatively.

We should change our name. The label "English teacher" does not sit well. The parochialism of "English Department" was brought home to me recently. Vacationing in Guadalajara, I attempted to visit the English departments of the two universities in the city. At first I was disturbed and even annoyed to discover that while these schools had faculties of medicine, architecture, humanities, and the like, there were no English literature teachers and no department set aside for the Great Tradition. It only slowly occurred to me how strange it would to be to find a department in Jalisco devoted to the literature, no matter how great, of a small, foreign island thousands of miles away, increasingly unimportant in the world. What next struck me was the peculiar academic parochialism of literature majors in Iowa or Kansas or Montana having to study Chaucer, Marvell, or Keats, at the expense of Proust, Mann, and Hamsun. Literature has

universal appeal, and intellectual appetites may be satisfied by a poem from Japan as readily as by one from England. To assume, tacitly or otherwise, that undergraduates in Jalisco or Montana should or could satisfy their literary appetites by reading selections from any one body of literature seems limiting in the extreme. And yet, by implication, this is what an "English" department forces, as it loads the student with more and more English requirements.

As a gesture symbolic of our desire to become a more potent force in society, let us change our name to "Department of Literature" or "Department of Literature in English" and throw open the door to the best foreign literatures in translation. I am convinced that if we must have a course called "the romantics," it should include poets of Germany, France, Spain, Japan, China, and Ethiopia. Since our goal will be not to "cover material," but to affect the minds and hearts of students and teachers, there is every reason to allow for eclectic dabbling and roaming through literatures and libraries.

We do not have to be specialists in Japanese poetry in order to read and teach it. There is no reason why teachers and students cannot learn together the conventions of a foreign poetry. One is constantly hearing platitudes about the student and teacher acting in a "cooperative venture in learning," about students as "junior colleagues" in the "academic community." It should be our job to read meaning back into these tired clichés. If I read Pope and Swift with nineteen-year-olds, I am the expert, they the initiates. But if I allow the study of classicism to carry us to Indonesia and China, I participate with my junior colleagues in a genuine "joint enterprise." I begin by knowing as little as they. We share a naive curiosity and bring to bear on the foreign literature whatever perception our particular experience provides.

Of course we will have to read the authors of the world in translation and doubtless our students will miss much of value as the poetry tends to evaporate. I sincerely wish to express my concern over the genuine loss one suffers when he reads works in translation. On the other hand, everyone I know among my colleagues and friends has read European literature in translation, even when they have some

proficiency in another language or two. And, needless to say, Tolstoy and Silone and Hauptmann have worked their magic even in translation. Let us encourage our students to study foreign languages, but at the same time let us show them the works which have operated so powerfully on us.

If students tend to like and profit from some romantic poetry at age twenty (say, the Lucy poems) and to dislike others ("The Recluse"?), would it not be sensible to select from the literatures of the world high quality poetry students like? There is no conceivable reason why we must force unpalatable works down the throats of students, when other works, equally great, can be found to be richly satisfying. As Freud urged and Norman O. Brown reminds us, the reader "must be suffering from the same repressions which the creative artist has overcome by finding a way of expressing the repressed unconscious." The student must read what he needs, not what we need. And he suffers no loss if he reads, say, Goethe instead of Johnson, Heine as well as Wordsworth, Lope de Vega instead of Dekker. If breadth of vision is a human asset, such substitutions could only be intellectual gains.

Personally, I am not in favor of introducing a few extra "world literature" courses into the English curriculum. These added courses would retain the aura of electives in a sea of requirements; they would seem somehow less valid or necessary or acceptable than the English courses. The student would still be an "English major." I am seeking a way to revolutionize our own professional self-view. The Department of Literature should be catholic and urbane, human and creative. Let us leave specialization to the technologists and encourage the techologists to spend some of their time generalizing with us.

Knowing about literature is a far cry from having the literary experience, as Northrop Frye—himself our worst offender—has told us. Our pedagogic aim should be to provide intellectual and emotional pleasure. And as we begin to succeed with our new educational policy, the "product" of that process will have to be substantially different from the man presently called "humanist"—different, that is, from us.

What I am calling for is a department which encourages self-respecting dilettantism, along with specialization where technology is called for. I am suspicious of a Department of Literature which has two linguistics specialists and no poets, graduate students concentrating on modern grammars or the history of literary criticism, but none writing novels: in short, a department which errs on the side of scientism, forming an intellectual bulwark against the heart. "At the beginning of each new term," writes Harvard professor G. S. Rousseau, "I tell my undergraduate students not to expect miracles or prophecies; I am not Cassandra: I tell them that I am basically a pedant, and that they should expect no more than intelligent footnotes on the literary works they are reading. That the tenor of my mind is far closer to the scientist's than to that of certain incomprehensible and irrational critics of literature. . . . That I wish the commodity I sell could be consumed with greater ease. . . . All this I tell my students, but with the knowledge that somehow, somewhere, some aspect of the communication itself is barren."

To be sure, scholarship should find a home in our Department of Literature. But this depressing passage by Professor Rousseau helps us to forget—as if we need help today—that literature, like life, has produced miracles and prophecies, as well as pendantry and scientism. I, for one, am glad to hear that Harvard students choke on Professor Rousseau's "commodity." I do not know who the incomprehensible and irrational critics may be (Norman Brown? Fiedler? Rahv?), but I do know that William Blake is incomprehensible, irrational, and brilliant and needs to be saved from the dissecting hands of the orderly and the ordinary, that the study of literature needs bardic and barbaric voices as well as Apollonian technologists, that Harvard students—bright, inquisitive, restive—are to be trusted when they feel despair at a pedagogy that confuses the meaningless phrase "literature and life" with the potent one "life in literature." Intelligent footnotes may be found in well-edited editions. The classroom calls for more, and especially for human interaction.

If we are to retain such courses as the history of the language, the history of criticism, linguistics, and other data-oriented studies,

let us at least shift our central emphasis where it belongs. I wish to see the reader's sensibility (not Baugh's, Bates', or Gleason's) at the center of our literature program. We should be deepening a young man's personal sense of life's ambiguities and mysteries. All the other fields deal with certainties and facts. I do not think we succeed when we tell him about the rise of neoclassicism, Aristotelianism, or phonemes—unless he asks. But as long as the university organizes itself on the "department" principle, let us encourage our students who want to equip themselves for specialized expertise to take history courses in the History Department, criticism (aesthetics) in the Philosophy Department, modern grammar in the Linguistics Department. For until we can rid undergraduate school of the sick fragmentation of human studies into departments, *our* concern should be with the creative process itself as exemplified by authors and readers. If our student wants to devote himself to footnotes, let him become an archivist. Literature is for a different sort of person or for the same person in a different mood.

One further piece of negative advice. Let us stop competing with other departments for prestige. "A little more Eros and less strife" is what Norman O. Brown recommends for the intellectual life. If we must compete, let us at least be strong enough to compete on our own terms, not those set by other disciplines. We should know by now that we cannot look respectable by imitating scholars whose scientific and technological fields demand rigid specialization. A psychologist or anthropologist has a profession, a particular job to do. But we teachers of literature expend more effort on the task of becoming "professionals" and scholars than on that of addressing ourselves to the real, pressing problems. Witness our major journals with their unreadable articles, fixed formats, and technical abstracts.

Our job is to broadcast the value of literature in its own terms. Failure to do so may be a commentary on the world, on literature, or on us. Perhaps the diurnal spinning of the world is carrying us to a time when poetry, novels, and plays will no longer produce pleasurable experiences in the minds of a race which has moved beyond the impact of the printed word. Perhaps literature is playing itself out—becom-

ing no longer potent enough to sustain interest in an age of space travel, brain surgery, psychedelia, and moral revolution. There is the sad possibility that teachers of literature—you and I—are anachronisms, catching momentary glimpses of the writing as it begins to appear on the wall. Would this help to explain the desperate attempt of our profession to imitate those who are Time's darling, the scientists and technologists? I have not written this paragraph in order to negate it at the end with a humanistic flourish. It may say the truth. I hope it does not.

I would still like to think that my personal reaction to literature mirrors the reaction and experiences of other readers and the potential experience of budding readers (our students) now and in the future. If it does, then the failure of literature teachers to help students discover the art's riches is the more distressing. For then it means that our profession, in its mad scramble for prestige and grants, has sold itself.

I hope this is not the case. One of my senior colleagues is convinced that the views expressed here represent a lack of respect for our "discipline." But he misses the point completely. We need not be ashamed of conveying a heritage of pleasure in a world largely devoted to the acquisitive work ethic. Let us keep alive the nerve ends as well as the mind. A few times a week our engineering students and home economists and perhaps even the English major may yet thrill to the overpowering feeling that the heart is a lonely hunter. Their other classes can teach them how things are made and the value of utilitarian procedures; it is our job to let them sense, through thought and intuition, mysticism and logic, the personal value of the experiences of Werther, Isabel Archer, and Swann. And to do this most rewardingly, we must remove ourselves from the competition with scientists on their terms. A perfect edition of American authors is meaningless if no one is around to read the literature.

The direction in which college literature departments go can be changed through positive thinking, as well as negative. I hope this whole book, especially chapters 3 and 4, will be viewed as a positive approach to some of the pedagogic problems which confront us.

I do not wish to belabor the ideas I have suggested earlier. The direction set forth in previous chapters should stand as my primary recommendation for more rewarding teacher-student relations.

As a corollary to my negative suggestion that we should play down our emphasis on history, criticism, and linguistics, I feel that we should make more conscious use of the connection between literature and the other fine arts. Long before I became a pedagogical lotus-eater, I felt that literature had more in common with painting, music, sculpture, and dance than with history, philosophy, and mathematics, at least as they are presently taught. Actually, I have always wanted to see literature taught in the Division of Fine Arts. But whether our dean is in Fine Arts or the Humanities, it is time we recognized the close affinities between literature and the other arts.

As a first step, we should reintroduce creative writing into our departments. Jencks and Riesman in *The Academic Revolution* urge such a change even for graduate students. I do not mean that we should add one more writing course to the two we already have. Nor am I suggesting a separate (and usually inferior) writing wing of the Department of Literature. The notion I wish to advance is that creative writing should be a large, significant part of every literature major's pursuits. We should not grade creative writing (or anything else, for that matter), but we should expect it as part of a literature major's commitment to and faith in the artistic process. Our goal is not to produce novelists and poets, but if we want our students to understand the genius that goes into creating a novel or a poem, what better way to encourage this appreciation than by allowing our students, without fear of grades as punishment, to try their hands at the work itself?

Certainly there should be separate writing workshops taught by poets, short-story writers, and playwrights. These courses should be central, not peripheral in the offerings of the Department of Literature. They need not be required, however, because I envision a department in which creative writing is encouraged in all courses, not only in separate ones set aside for creativity. For example, in a lyric poetry course students should be encouraged to write their own poems: a

practice as richly rewarding as an analytic paper on the imagery of H. D., and much more difficult. I do not deny that a sensitive, scholarly essay on Browning or Wordsworth may enrich a student's sense of the particular values of these poets, but I would urge that the writing of a dramatic monologue or five or six short lyrics on one theme is at least as potently educative. The writing of a lyric would enhance one's experience with poetry, as the writing of satires would bring home the difficult achievements of Pope and Swift. Maybe we teachers, so often out of contact with the wellsprings of imagination, should also try our hand at poetry from time to time.

Just as the reading of literature should be coordinated with the writing of literature, we should encourage an active engagement on the part of our students in the other arts. If we have students interested in Pope, Swift, and Johnson, our classical literature course could be integrated with the study of Hogarth, Reynolds, and other graphic artists and with the music of the period. Team-teaching in the Division of Fine Arts could produce an exciting multi-media, full-culture approach to the eighteenth century or any other period. I am not suggesting that we need necessarily stay with "period" courses at all, but if we continue to view the "period" as one possible perspective on the study of literature, we have many more imaginative options than have traditionally been taken advantage of.

Cross-reference among the arts is almost inexhaustible. Some teachers are currently investigating the rich vein of popular poetry and music. Collins singing Yeats may be appreciatively studied in a college classroom by a musicologist, a poetry teacher, a sociologist, and the students whose youth culture has accepted, legitimized, and understood the artistry of what is still called "folk" music. The students do not know everything, but what they do know they can teach us. Imagine the joy involved in a mixed faculty-and-student-group endeavor to set up creative learning environments and methods, making use of language, color, music, and shape. Think, also, of how much the average teacher of literature could experience and learn through such activities.

Jencks and Riesman point the way to a related reform. They

speak of the possible values of introducing, into isolated, discrete departments, professors whose training has been in other areas. For example, a medical faculty may profit from introducing sociologists who could study the effects on society of certain medical practices and advances or the effect of group response to particular drugs, placebos, etc. A sociology department could conceivably benefit from hiring a historian or a political scientist who would offer courses in their own specialties, but focusing on the relationship of particular historical or political issues to matters sociological. I would like to see a literature teacher in the Psychology Department. The possibilities are endless. But as Jencks and Riesman point out, virtually no academic fields are taking advantage of the expertise developed in other areas.

Why not lead the way in our Department of Literature? Most central to our concerns would be the work of psychologists and sociologists. The department could have on its permanent staff a psychologist and sociologist (and perhaps an educationist) whose interests lie in the area of the impact of art on the mind of a man and on society. Certainly there are professional psychology and sociology teachers available who would entertain the idea of a split appointment—half in their own disciplines, half in literature.

Students of literature are currently wearing us out with seemingly unanswerable questions about the "relevance" of literature. Our nineteenth-century answers are less and less satisfactory. Why not have a psychologist teach a course in our department dealing with such fascinating questions as What happens to one's head as one reads? What special powers over the mind does literature have? When do such powers fail to operate? Can reading indeed alter one's "personality"? What can be known about the creative process? About genius? About madness?

From a sociologist we could hope to learn something about the real social values of literature. Where has literature as a pastime come from; where is it now; where is it going? As future teachers of literature, our students may wish to know from sociology and educational research answers to such questions as What have behavioral studies

revealed about ways to satisfy the intellectual needs of undergraduates? What is the connection—if any—between group therapy and education? Under what circumstances can very large groups be expected to "learn"? What has been learned about the teaching process itself? About the "teacher"? About the "student"? What is the direction being sought by innovative teaching methods?

Would a sociologist or psychologist have his literature students read literature for their specialized classes? Wherever relevant, yes. But presumably these specialists—scientists—would be devoting themselves to providing our students with the sorts of studies from their own specialties which could serve the interests of readers of literature, especially future teachers. Not everyone need be a trained psychologist, but directed reading of specialized studies can be richly rewarding and pleasurable. At present an "English major" who wants to know something about psychology must take the often stultifying prerequisite courses dealing with perception, reaction formation, and the like. Why not let him learn much of this formal data by inference in a course focusing on concerns of vital importance to him as a person who has committed himself to the study of literature?

Students are always embarrassing teachers with questions about the value of studying literature. There is perennial misgiving that the study of literature "serves no purpose." Recently a talented historian and successful teacher told me that he left the English department when he was an undergraduate major because he found that literature had nothing to do with life. Such complaints are by no means restricted to the weaker intellects. Indeed, often the liveliest intellects are the ones most perplexed by the seemingly sterile accumulation of titles, "meanings," and significances. It is not enough to answer these queries with flabby talk about the best that has been thought and said. If the value of literature is personal, a psychological perspective could help to elucidate the meaning of the human rewards; to the degree that literature is community property, a sociological approach could be useful. Students have a right to information about literature's dynamic place in the human comedy as a whole. If they do not have this right or if there are no humanly satisfying answers, then it really is time to throw in the sponge.

Teachers are forever expressing surprise over the fact that they teach their best classes when they have just read the novel or poems for the first time or when they have forgotten their notes and have to work extemporaneously. And yet the great majority of teachers fail to draw from these paradoxes the obvious conclusions: namely, that they are better instructors (not better scholars, of course) when the literature is fresh, when they are sharing with the students initial impressions rather than imparting seasoned information, when the expert gives way to or at least shares the lectern with the enthusiast. Ideally, I would like to see professors of literature condemned to teach new courses every term. This is not so difficult when a teacher does not feel compelled to draw up expert notes or to come to conclusions on each work the night before it is discussed. Where the ideal is unattainable, I would choose to have the professor pursuing in class the answer to a question about the familiar literature which he has no idea at first how to answer. In other words, let the Renaissance teacher use his standard syllabus, but let each term's work be designed to answer one question or set of questions, never asked before, about the poems and plays. Or in a non-directed atmosphere let the students pose and attempt to answer their own questions. Such an endeavor would give vitality and organic shape to the study. Students can be expected to want to participate as junior partners in real investigations. Then they will discover their own "gaps" and may feel the urge in time to fill them. I maintain that where no such urge exists, gap-filling is a meaningless ritual.

The college catalog should make it clear that no special emphasis will be put on "coverage." Every year the listings should be changed to reflect the current interests of the professors and the requests of the student body. All courses should be electives. None should be graded. Entries in the catalog should be personal and evocative:

> Spring 1970. Professor Jones. Course: Terror Literature. The list of readings will be made up of three groups of gothic works: (1) some traditional classics, such as *The Castle of Otranto, The Monk, Melmoth the Wanderer, Frankenstein;* (2) modern gothic

works which I have set aside to read for the first time—Hawkes' *The Cannibal,* selected works by Dinesen, O'Connor, Capote, etc.; (3) works suggested by the students. Individual and group projects to be decided by class.

or

Winter 1970. Professor Mandel. Course: Autobiography. The course will focus on the single question: What has autobiography lost or gained as an art by moving closer and closer to fictional narrative? We will concentrate on some of the most recent autobiographies, comparing them with classic works as the instructor's growing acquaintance with the new ones suggests comparisons and contrasts. Course contract involves one paper: the question for this study will re-pose the question which has been at the heart of the course investigation.

The catalog, the readings, the classroom procedures all should move to provide a unified experience for the learner: an unpressured confrontation with human experiences as portrayed by literature. If our courses must be "introductions" and "exposures," let them introduce and expose life styles, sensibilities, ideas, and emotions which can serve to quicken the reader's own life tempo.

Finally, I should like to urge the Department of Literature to put aside prejudices against teacher education and to face up to reality. Teachers are what a great number of our students become. Many of them who will teach in universities, colleges, junior colleges, community colleges, and prep schools do not take any courses in the Department of Education. And those that do too often find themselves engulfed in a make-work program which stifles curiosity or true experimentation. Is it not feasible for the Department of Literature to offer at least one enlightened, non-graded discussion seminar in the problems of teaching poems, plays, and novels to young men and women? This course could be team-taught by a literature teacher, an educationist, a psychologist, and perhaps a graduate assistant. Such a course could, at least, unsettle the received pedagogic opinions of our students and generate some fresh thoughts on the subject.

All of these suggestions are, of course, debatable. They are all based, however, on the assumption that our educational program should be designed for those who want to learn. I do not think that a program should be designed to prevent lazy or dishonest students from slipping through. Let them go if they will. We are not policemen, and a student who muffs his chances for an education is no criminal. If our system of education is flexible enough, perhaps we can be of service later to these relatively few students who presently feel no temptation to join friends and faculty members in their common pursuit.

I feel that only one element should be absolutely beyond question as we move toward our ideal Department of Literature. I should "institute" free-swinging flexibility in an atmosphere of perpetual experimentation. Ideas which work I should advocate saving. Weaker experiments should be abandoned unhesitatingly. The goal would be to interest 100 percent of the student body in the experience of reading literature. One's chief method would be the constant refining of the educational environment. Recognized failure would mean immediate, revolutionary reevaluation. No more would we settle for "getting to a few" each term. Such a view does more than a little to deprive large numbers of people of one of the most rewarding human activities.

The teacher should become as aware of his methods and tools as the scholar is aware of his. What we need is more self-scrutiny, more realistic self-evaluation among teachers. The teacher of literature should recognize that certain time-honored approaches to literature (as well as many personally satisfying techniques for understanding a play or novel) simply do not work with students from third-rate high schools, illiterate families, and a tradition which expects answers rather than questions from teachers. Our departments should encourage an open-door policy whereby teachers and students could visit other classes. Colleagues should learn to invite and tolerate criticism concerning their teaching methods. Faculty discussion groups should gather, not only to hear papers on scholarly matters, but to delve into pedagogical questions and matters of group dynamics. In

short, people who say they are concerned about education should be constantly on the alert to learn something new about it.

My suggestions move toward creating a department of modest learners. The reading and teaching of literature does not call for experts and settled opinions. In the spirit of inquiry (try teaching a course in Noh drama or current absurdist off-off-Broadway plays), students and instructors can learn together, each bringing to bear his own experiences, perceptions, and perspectives. St. John's has for years worked on the principle of teacher participation in the learning process. A professor may be called upon to teach literature, basic French, astronomy, and mathematics. Other schools, such as Goddard College, have also worked innovatively for many years with very great success. The best sociology or anthropology departments are so exciting today because their sense of accomplishment is accompanied by modesty before yet-to-be-discovered truths.

Literature teachers and readers of all ages are themselves untapped oceans: huge reservoirs of subtle feelings and responses. A great novel can tap that power; a free, spontaneous, intelligent discussion can harness it. If we teachers of literature open ourselves to creativity as we encourage it in others, if we can capture and share our old love of Anna Karenina and Stephen Dedalus as we allow ourselves to meet a host of characters still waiting in the wings, if we can see that Erikson, Langer, Marcuse, and Brown may be as relevant to our concerns as Frye, Summers, and Crane—then we may find teaching literature an experience almost as pleasurable, subtle, and vital as reading it.

Selected Bibliography

The following handful of books represents the basic reading list of a course I am presently teaching—Experimental Methods in the Teaching of Literature. The books come from various fields, but I believe the sympathetic reader will understand their relevance to the issues raised in these essays. The list in no way attempts to be comprehensive; it is, rather, suggestive and even occasionally inspirational.

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